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GRACE  
WARDWOOD



ATHÈNE





Nathan Wolff





# GRACE WARDWOOD

OR,

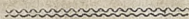
FROM THE GLOOM OF WINTER TO THE  
GLORIES OF SUMMER.

BY

ATHÈNE,

Author of

“IN THE VALLEYS OF SOUTH DOWN.”



**Dublin:**

JAMES DUFFY AND CO., LTD.,  
15 WELLINGTON QUAY.  
1900.



**Dedicated**

TO

MY DEAR MOTHER,

AND TO ALL WHO LOVE A CHRISTMAS TALE TOLD IN THE

DELIGHTFUL WARMTH AND PLEASANT LIGHT OF THE

CRACKLING BLAZE OF THE YULE-LOG,

AND WHO

BRING TO THE ENTERTAINMENT A PURE HEART,

CLEAN HANDS, AND A CLEAR CONSCIENCE.

ATHENE.





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# GRACE WARDWOOD;

OR,

FROM THE GLOOM OF WINTER TO THE  
GLORIES OF SUMMER.

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## CHAPTER I.

CHRISTMAS EVE AT THE CROSS-ROADS FARM.—THE MORTON  
FAMILY AND THE FAMILY CUSTOMS.

**A**LL the day it had snowed, and indeed a great part of the preceding night; whirling, eddying, feathery snow-flakes; every crevice, hole, and cranny is filled till all sounds are muffled, and voices seem a long way off, and you are startled to see a few yards ahead of you a great snow mass, who seems to want to walk right over you; you are not certain if this moving mass of snow is a man till he draws up just when he perceives another snow mass—yourself—and each knows the other to be human only when they hear each other's cheery voices.

People are exceedingly cheerful and jolly at the beginning of a fall of snow; a real, good fall, not a sprinkling, like sugar, on a cake, or the snow on the coat and cap of Father Christmas, which one sees in the



shop windows. A dusting over of white, which does not cover the earth's nakedness, but makes creatures look blue and cold and pinched, and tries to deceive them into believing this is snow. Oh, no! A snow-fall, such as comes preceded by a sky like lead, with great banks of heavy snow clouds piled up mass upon mass, till not a blink of blue sky can be seen, nor a ray of the king of light can pierce their sullen veil, and the cold is so bitter, so biting, so intense, that every living thing knows it foretells snow.

The harpies come out, and scream and twirl and shriek in gusts that have a black breath, and call upon their sisters, the furies, to come out likewise. They come upon the wings of the storm, shrieking and howling, too, like demons. And, not to be behindhand, out come the fates, doleful phantoms of dark, mysterious prophecy. Surely the fairies are there, things wondrous, witches and warlocks, and long-nebbed things; fairies good and evil, and angels, too, to protect the benighted travellers upon whom the storm has come down and enveloped them around with impenetrable walls of blinding snow. All those myriads, millions upon millions, and again millions of twirling, reeling, dancing, flying, rushing little snow-white, feathery atoms—are they spirits? One can almost think so as they gaze enraptured, as they watch them rushing into each other's arms to kiss, and instantly fly off again to greet and embrace some others as they twirl.

Who can follow the flight of one of these little seeming spirits in their feather-brained, maddening, joyous dance? before they settle down to build snow-palaces, to cover the nakedness of old Mother Earth in her

winter poverty, to cover the woods, whose skeleton limbs are extended to receive them, holding out ghastly, bleached, blackened, dead arms; knotted, gnarled, stiff, helpless, unbending arms, so old and so weak, and so helpless and dead, that the lightly-falling snow may knapple them off before it has done robing them:—to cover up the muddy streams, the turbid, rolling river; to cover over height and hollow, mountain, mead, and moorland; to obliterate the bleak, unblooming heath, and furze, and brooms; to cover up the rocks and stones, the deep gulches and gloomy ravines; to fill up dales, and smooth down hills; to cover over clustering villages, and play against tall spires and belfries, cottage-homes, castles, mansions, rich estates, peasant's cot, and porter's lodge, churches, chapels, old roads, little paths, great bridges, stepping-stones, and turnstiles; to cover the homes of rich and poor, of people and things, animals, beasts of the fields, fowls of the air, and things which creepeth upon the earth; to powder into ivy-covered walls, struggling to find the cosy corner of the owl; to sift through imperfect roofs, to see if the miserable creatures beneath have not sufficient covering, and, if not, pepper down upon them a spotless counterpane, or mayhap, a winding-sheet:—dust itself over withered grass and dead daisies; cover up, hide away, the little mounds in the silent churchyards; flutter against the marble and granite, and costly stone and simple slate, spelling the names as they pass, laying upon the graves a shroud as cold as death; silently fluttering down, down upon the stately tomb, and upon the nameless, unmarked grave. Sifting through thorn hedges, and piling up immense



piles of drift, powder, dust; sift, pepper, flicker, flutter; falling, falling, falling, silent as death, with death on its wings and in its touch, and in its breath, soft as swans-down, but remorseless as death.

And yet, how the snowflakes dance as they come, as if they were angels of mercy, and of joy, and of happiness, whispering of the beauty and sweetness they mean to leave behind when they go, at the idea of which they flutter and flicker more and more, nursed in the lap of the wind, tossed up, as a babe in arms, with shrieks of delight (from the nurse, not the nursling), tossed and dandled, playing at kiss-a-dove; or, like school children in their games, but their games are more complex than are those of the children of earth—a dance within the maze, a play that none may know; out and in here and there, away, everywhere, up and down, fluttering, flickering, falling into the glens and quarries, into the gorge and glade, over field and furrows, over dykes and downs, through lofty trees, through low-set shrubs, through stately pines, and weeping willows, and gloomy yews, and gay-decked holly, into little forsaken corners, or corners that were never known, anywhere, everywhere, none too remote, or far away, or out of reach, but they espy it, and forthwith settle there, clothe it in purity and beauty, the little spot where the snow-drops peep, where the golden daffodils wave their heads, where the crocuses deck the earth, where violets shed their sweetness, where the footstep of spring first touches the land, where buds burst forth, where birds begin to twitter, and blossoms blow, there they fall, lay themselves to rest after their mad fit of gaiety, after their giddy dance, after their merry frolic, after their



revel of joy, fluttering and flickering and falling, ever falling, ever falling, covering all things animate and inanimate with a rich, heavy garb of snow-white, dazzling purity :—pile it up in heaps, veritable palaces and castles, such as the hands of man build not, but a thousand times more beautiful, more grotesque, more fantastic, more ethereal, more heavenly.

In the window of a County Down farmhouse kitchen stands a tall, graceful figure, looking out into the silent, tumultuous whirl of snowy atoms. The glow of a turf fire warms up the background, and shines out through the unblinded window upon the wide expanse of snow beyond, casting into *alto rilievo* the figure in the window. The December evening has come to a close extremely early, the heavy snow-fall assisting to bring black night even faster than it is willing to come.

Only a quarter past three the tall oak clock in the hall has chimed, and night is upon us. The figure in the window has been there for more than an hour watching the falling of the snow, with a piece of lace-work in her fingers ; but, as she watched, both hands and lace dropped into her lap, and her mind wandered away into dreamland—wandered back to her school-days, to her girlish friends, to some of their homes which she has visited, and she wonders how each and all are going to spend their Christmas.

Her imagination calls up scenes of gaiety, pleasure, brightness, bustle, laughter, chatter, everything, indeed, which follows in the footsteps of festive preparations for Christmas. Curious it is that few of us in our dreamings visit scenes of poverty, of squalor, nakedness, sickness, drunkenness, with grim want, misery, and death

stalking about (their filthy rags scarce able to cover their gaunt, skeleton limbs). When we dream it is of pleasant things and pleasant places, lighted up with *couleur de rose*, rays of gold, of the beautiful, the gracious, the charming, the fragrant, the delicious—of things that most appeal to our several temperaments and delight our different natures,—unreal things, imaginary, visionary, if you will, but nevertheless sweet and soothing to our senses. Perhaps dangerously sweet and tempting sometimes. But

“It never yet did hurt to lay down likelihoods and forms of hope.”

The poor wretch, who, in his poverty, misery, nakedness, and want, can dream, surely dreams of pleasures, known or unknown—such as the capacity of his brain has power to conjure up, and which help him to forget his misery for a time, as he forms his air-castles of what, perchance, he may yet attain, like the castle-building of the boy, who, in the sweet chiming of the bells and the purring of his dumb companion, the cat, ever heard the refrain :

“Turn again, Dick Whittington, Lord Mayor of London.”

All dreamers dream of desirable things, for a dream is essentially a glimpse, a foretaste of Paradise, a moment of bliss.

So of pleasant things Grace Wardwood dreams as she rises up and stands watching the little white-winged messengers flutter against the window panes. She gazes and dreams until her mind reaches that stage when the brain relaxes, suspends action, and looks



forward into vacancy in a moment's happy oblivion, unseeing, unthinking, until some faint sound or slight movement starts it off again upon its work. A large piece of pine wood, which had been blazing in the fire, crackles suddenly and tumbles down, carrying with it a great black turf which had only begun to light. The movement recalls Grace, and she looks round with a start, and, as she sees the fallen turf, says, with a half laugh, "A visitor; it is not very probable we shall have a visitor to-night. No one could make their way a mile in such blinding snow."

Grace gives a slight shiver, leaves her lace upon the chair by which she stands, and goes to replace the wood and the great black visitor. While she is thus occupied she hears the dull sound of footsteps without, plunging in, and deadened by the snow; the door opens, admitting the two maid-servants, who immediately proceed to prepare tea for master and men, light the lamps, draw the blinds, and make all things cosy and comfortable.

Grace goes into the family sitting-room, stirs up the fire, draws the blinds, and lights a pretty lamp herself before Minnie, the maid, makes her appearance with the tea-tray.

Grace Wardwood has been at the Cross-roads, her brother-in-law's farm, nearly six months; her parents have been dead four years; her father lived only a few months after his wife, a slight accident disclosing unsuspected heart-trouble, to which he succumbed after a short illness, leaving his two daughters with nice little fortunes each—Ruth, the elder of the two, being engaged to Mr. Tom Morton. There was a quiet wedding,



and Ruth went to be mistress of the Cross-roads. But Grace, being nearly six years younger, was to remain at school until she was twenty, at which estate she had arrived about six months before; so, having nothing better to do, she came to visit her sister and brother-in-law, and had spent a happy summer amongst the hills and valleys of beautiful South Down. As she became known in the neighbourhood she was received everywhere with smiles and pleasant words, for Grace herself had always a gentle word and winning smile for the poor or for the children, the latter of whom would watch for her coming shyly, but with an eager, expectant gleam in the corner of their sharp little eyes; Grace oftentimes having with her not only a pleasant smile, but a packet of sweetmeats, the delight of every childish heart; the mother looking on from the doorway pleased and smiling, when the little one, having obtained the coveted portion, ran with delight to show what the lady had given. Many a little basket had she carried, both from herself and her sister, to comfort the hearts of poor creatures, who, but for their kindly thought, would have had little to comfort them in this festive season. Many a blessing had she heard called down upon their heads for their goodness of heart and the relief they brought.

Mrs. Morton had been busy in the outer kitchen with her cooking for the morrow. Christmas Eve saw Mrs. Morton with her larders and pantries laden, her cooking stoves suggesting real vitality—they were so hot with the amount of unusual duty that was required of them.

The outer kitchen, or kitchen proper, was where all

the cooking was done, and also where the farm labourers had their meals. So now, when it approached the tea hour, and Mrs. Morton not quite having her culinary operations finished—the great table in the middle of the floor groaning under the weight of the utensils necessary for its execution—she considers it would be waste of labour removing them and having to bring them all back again, so dismisses her maids to prepare it in the inner kitchen. This is only called kitchen from force of habit, and is in truth a very pleasant, comfortable, homely, large room, whose dark, heavy beams might tell of Christmas and Harvest-home festivities—where laughter reigned, where cups o’erflowed, where stories circled, where fiddles twanged, where dancing feet resounded, and feasting was the order of the day, where family gatherings and conclaves took place, and when comfort was most in demand—the general room, indeed, for all and every general purpose. It had a huge fireplace and a blazing fire.

Mr. Morton has one weakness, and that is for a delightful fire. He says it has been in his family throughout successive generations. As long as there was a family of Morton, the head of the house saw that in severe winter weather there was such a fire as might roast an ox, or, as he expressed it, one that made everybody “sit back.” His grandfather, his father, and now himself superintended the building of these fires themselves. All through the year if an unnecessary log of wood, however large, turned up, he consigned it to the wood-house for the winter fires. He said no man believed more in economy and in permitting no destructive waste, but saving should be done at the



proper time—when saving was the right thing to do—but he did not consider a bitter winter night, with the snow falling, and all the witches and imps let loose, and screaming and howling round the house, like so many evil spirits, the proper time to economize firing.

So on this Christmas Eve he had had his fire built, and of such materials, too, as many a more negligent or less careful man lets remain lying in their ditches, and did not take the trouble of thus providing a real yule-log to greet the season in a seasonable manner. This fire was composed of a great thick log of wood, placed at the back of the wide open fireplace, heaped up behind with “coom” (*i.e.*, fragments of turf and moulds), all of which is quite damp. In front of the block is a brightly burning fire of hard, black turf well ablaze, with a piece of pinewood (a chip of fir) set at the correct angle, giving out the truly pleasant glow that pervaded the room before the lighting of the lamps, and which, even after they were lighted, bade fair to rival their more steady light. Only an expert can build this fire; if the log be placed in an unsteady position, then the wet coom falls into the fire, putting it out, or at least endangers it, and not all the night can it be got into proper working order; whereas, if it is properly done it will gradually dry up, and turn into a mass of glowing, living fire, such as is the very delight of the heart of the reigning head of the Morton family.

As Minnie places the tea-pot upon the table and covers it up with a warm cosy, covered over with a linen-embroidered slip, Mr. and Mrs. Morton come in, and little Georgie, the son and heir, and succeeding



head of yet another generation, they all cheerfully seat themselves round the table.

Grace, who is toasting some slices of bread a delicate golden brown before the fire, rises from her position on the rug, and brings the toast to the table, where she proceeds to butter it, leaving a little pile unbuttered for her brother-in-law, as he prefers it, and placing it just at his hand, her cheeks aglow with the toasting which they have likewise received—a lovely colour radiating them. Meanwhile Mrs. Morton pours out tea, and little Georgie clamours for toast from his high chair between his father and mother, not that he is by any means hungry, for he has been eating of his mother's pastry hot from the oven. Of course he had to get a piece of each successive variety—dear child! he does love cakes so, and now his appetite is not very ravenous. But Georgie has a large heart, and loves to see his plate well piled up. When he has got a good slice upon his plate, and his little enamelled cup of tea placed before him, he is content to sit and watch the others, and to get an occasional tit-bit from his father's plate, or a piece of sugar, slipped for him surreptitiously from his mother's sugar basin.

Upon the table Grace has grouped some beautiful hyacinths, growing in their water vases, their soft pink and pure white waxen bells diffusing a delicious fragrance, which, commingling with the aroma of tea and toast, fills the room with an exquisite perfume.

When they have finished tea they dawdle over the table for a few minutes, chatting in indulgent idleness. Mr. Morton tells them of a great fright Watson, the ploughman and groom of the stables generally, has had

the preceding night, when the men-servants are heard coming into the kitchen with great clamping noise, loud talking, and much laughter. Georgie clambers from his chair immediately, Mr. Morton pushes back his chair, and they both go into the kitchen. The loud talking and laughter which greet their appearance draw Mrs. Morton and Grace there too.

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## CHAPTER II.

TALES ROUND THE YULE LOG.—THE SPIRIT OF THE HORSE'S  
SADDLE.—OLD MOLLIE THE WITCH AND LONG DAN.

THE great table is drawn out into the middle of the floor and covered with a coarse, but spotless cloth, and seated round it were three men, an empty chair proclaiming yet another who has not come in. Each man is engaged upon a huge piece of soda-bread and butter and a large mug of hot tea, measuring about a pint; and in the intervals of their attacks a great joke excites their mirth, suspending operations sometimes to leave room for the talking. When Mrs. Morton appears at the door, a great strong, burly, grizzly, middle-aged man turns round, bread in hand, to tell her of what has occurred, and in a voice sometimes of superstitious awe, sometimes jokingly, relates the incident.

Watson, the youngest man of the lot and who is not in yet, had seen the "Ould Squire" the night before, and had got such a shock that he had not yet overcome it. He comes in now pale, his eyes wide open, dark and glowing, and in anything but a joking mood.

He had been sent by his master on some small business into the market-town, and had requested and obtained permission to spend the evening with his friends there. The time had been spent in a very pleasant manner; his host, a cousin of his own and the



father of a family, had exclaimed in startled surprise, when Watson began to talk of going home: "Good Lord, Watt, have you to pass both the Church and the Horse's Saddle?" and had detained him to hear an account of what had happened his father many years ago, at the Horse's Saddle. A lone and weird-looking spot, mountainous and almost barren, with widely scattered inhabitants who lived in the smallest of sod-built huts with a hole in the roof through which the blue turf and whin smoke twined and curled, and a single pane of glass plastered into an aperture in the wall without woodwork or frame of any description, and not more than one foot square, doing duty for a window; and who eked out a scant livelihood amongst the rocks and furze; grew their potatoes and corn in a few inches of soil, and had the milk of goats or little black Kerry cows, just such animals as could live like themselves on the scantiest and poorest food.

The Horse's Saddle, a high, bold, promontory with only the faintest resemblance to a saddle. A rocky face covered with wiry grass, juttied out somewhat over the road that wound at its base and kept a frowning guard over those wayfarers who boldly dared to pass its dread precincts in "the wee sma' hours ayont the twal." It is reported to be haunted, but by what sort of thing is unknown, whether ghostly spirits or witches upon broomsticks none know, for they are unseen by human eye, only the effect of their fell deeds remain to tell the tale.

The true legend which gave the rock its name and repute, but which is scouted by many is: A certain gentleman of high degree, riding at twelve o'clock on a dark, bitter, winter night—within the darkest shadow

of the rock, suddenly felt his saddle dragged and torn by unseen hands from under him, and would surely have died of fright if he had not had a silver mounted brandy flask in the inner breast pocket of his coat pressed close against his heart, wherewith to sustain himself in his time of trial.

Poor Watson chafed at being detained, for as he glanced towards the long eight-day clock beside the fireplace, the hands were working vigorously for eleven, and it would be near twelve before he got home. But his cousin being very long-winded, and loving the sound of his own voice, did not let himself easily be balked of the chance of telling a good story. Watson being naturally of a superstitious nature hated to have these stories recalled to his memory so freshly just as he was about to pass the scenes of action, but good manners forced him into submission.

Old Sammy Watson lived at the Rough Quarter; he had a small piece of land and kept a cow and a sheltie. Upon one occasion he had gone to Castleton, and, like Watson of our tale, had spent the evening with some friends. Their evening had been jovial, and his friend had pressed something hot upon his departing guest, and that guest being nothing loth had sat warming himself without and within much later than he reckoned on. But when he mounted his old nag, he was so cosy that he did not press him to too great a speed, but sang snatches of songs to himself to beguile the way.

The night was dark and cold, and he had a faint remembrance of looking fearfully at the grim face of the Saddle; but he was too drowsily happy to think much of such things, when suddenly he was dashed



from his horse by unseen hands, and by a peculiar twirl his neck dislocated.

Soon after he was found lying upon the road, with his poor old horse standing over him with drooping head, with the seeming resolution of at least standing by his master if he could not render him any assistance. He was carried to the nearest house, a tiny hut in a nook of the Saddle, with one old gnarled thorn, bleak and dreary-looking, like a phantom, standing by it, creaking and groaning in the night wind.

In this hut lived an old woman and her son. Old Molly, as she was called, was a medicine-woman, and was known far and wide for her powers and the wondrous cures which she was able to perform.

Amongst the greatest came, first, the cure of the bite of a rabid dog; the cure of cancer; the cure of rheumatism and sprains. She dispensed salves and herbaceous potations for delicate digestions and a variety of diseases and complaints innumerable, all of which were her own compounding. In her family for generations immemorial the recipes for these had been handed down *verbatim*, under oath of strictest secresy, from mother to daughter; and Molly's greatest grievance was that she had no daughter to whom she could bequeath her treasures. But her son, Dan, was an apt pupil, and was almost as knowing and dexterous-fingered as herself.

From far and wide patients came to Molly, and she worked her marvellous cures upon them without fee or reward. But, of course, the grateful did not leave her presence without giving a suitable remuneration to prove their sense of gratitude, else they would be very

monsters of ingratitude, indeed. Her fame was on every lip in the hot summer months, the cold winter months, the fresh spring months, and the balmy autumn months. A cured maid-servant (Minnie of the Cross-roads) told of how she went to Molly with a sprained wrist, black and swollen, with which she was not able to touch anything, and the next day she was so far recovered as to be able to wash a large washing of clothes. Their faith was strong and their constitutions sound, so what with these and the strong, fresh, sweet, invigorating breezes of Molly's native mountains, combined with her charms, the cures were rapid as well as sure.

Some sceptics had the face to doubt and to suggest that Molly had an evil eye, and that she could bewitch, or "blink," and, in fact, that she could not help herself from doing this thing; and that, if the light of her evil eye once rested on you, you would never be the same thing again. But Molly's own people believed in her, and for many a mile round Molly was their only doctor, for none of them had the wherewithal to pay for higher science than Molly possessed. Faith did much, and Molly's stuff did the rest.

But Sammy Watson, to fall into Molly's hands, of all people on earth, he declared that, if he had only known it, he would have died of fright; but, instead, it was said Molly gave his neck a cunning twist, and restored it to its socket again, and with a little *potheen* refreshed and revived his languid spirits. Her son, Dan, who had found Sammy on his way home from a "calley," and had carried him in, so that his mother might see if anything was wrong with him, was a great, tall, lank



man, turning grey, and, like his mother, was all bones, muscles, and skin. Flesh seemed not to be amongst the materials necessary for their composition. He stood by while she ministered to the wants of the prostrate man. And Molly, with her short skirts, her wrinkled, withered, yellow face, and rough, straggling iron-grey locks, bound with a white spotted red cotton handkerchief, knotted beneath her chin, although she looked like the very Witch of Endor—yet she was a kindly soul, and tended Sammy unweariedly till he showed signs of recovery. He commenced to mutter something drowsily, and Dan bent down to hear what he said; but, with a sharp jerk, drew himself upright again. He saw his mother devoutly crossing herself; she, having caught something of what Sammy said, thought the poor man was saying his prayers. Dan did not undeceive her, or tell her that Sammy was sending the father of an old church to a very hot climate—whether for the winter months only or for good he did not wait to hear—but bundled him unceremoniously upon his old nag, which had all this time been tied to, and left to commune with, the spirits of the weird thorn outside.

During the accomplishment of this feat, Sammy must have had an inkling of the hands he was in, and the impetus which Dan gave him not being exactly to his liking, he apostrophised the Madonna aloud. “Aw, Mary,” said he, “when you’re good, you are too good; it’s either in or over wi’ ye.” Dan gave the poor old sheltie a slap with his palm, and told Sammy to “get along home, ye owld divel.”

Molly was soon enlightened as to Sammy’s prayers,

when she heard them repeated in a loud, roaring voice, and along with it the mention of our first parents, which they could hear him shouting alternately, and which echo returned from every peak and cliff until distance charitably softened the vile sound. At the end of the story the clock struck eleven, every booming stroke sounding in Watson's ears like a knell, and by the time he had got his horse saddled and ready, the quarter-past had gone. His host still, on hospitality bent, asked him, with a jerk of his thumb backwards towards a tall cupboard, if he would not take a pull at the high-shouldered bottle to keep him warm; but Watson declined, being now in a desperate hurry, and thinking to himself he could have taken it if it were not for "Ould Sammy" so vividly before his eyes, and Molly the Witch, the gnarled thorn, and Long Dan; the grim phantom of the Horse's Saddle, and the terrors of the unseen hands. A regular panorama opened up before him, *par plaisir et entertenier*, to beguile the way.

Watson tried with all his might to forget these things, and to occupy his mind with the very nicest and pleasantest things he could think of. His sweetheart figured a good while, and did wonders in banishing fearful things for a time; but his store of cheerful thoughts seemed to be exhausted as he drew nearer and nearer, and a dread chill lay heavy on his heart. A pale moon peeped now and then through the broken snow-clouds, tiny twinkling stars blinked their little bright eyes, as if expectantly waiting for the play to begin. But, as he approached the spot, all was still, excepting the gusts of cutting wind wickedly careering



around. The great rock stood, grim as ever, overlooking the road, but Molly is no longer there to minister to the wants of the wayfarer who may, perchance, fall into the clutches of the unseen hands. Her little hut in the nook of the Saddle is a ruin, and nought but the old thorn stands intact to tell of her ministrations, *bonne âme, sit tibi terra levis*.—Good soul! may the green sod lie lightly on thy grave!

Long Dan has married, and gone to a more fruitful part of the earth, and the unseen hands themselves—unhappy spirits!—seem to have been laid, whether exorcised by Molly, or whether they have grown tired of their own antics, who can say? And now Watson, to his intense relief, sees nought of these as he urges his horse to its best speed, the while keeping a sharp lookout to right and left, as, like Tam-o'-Shanter, he flies like the wind through the darkest shadows of the Horse's Saddle. For more than a mile he keeps up this pace along the gently-sloping road, clean and broad, at any time a pleasant place for a canter; and the sound of his horse's feet rings out clear, and sharp, and musical over the frozen ground.

He had been so occupied with fears of the Saddle that, for the time, he had utterly forgotten the Church, and now a greater terror succeeds a lesser.

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## CHAPTER III.

NOCTURNAL PERAMBULATIONS OF THE OLD SQUIRE.—THE  
YOUNG SQUIRE AND THE BLACK-BROWED KEEPER.

**I**N Watson's mind the Horse's Saddle was a mere nothing to the Church. The ghost here was a visible ghost, a known ghost, for here it was that the old Squire was supposed to take his nocturnal perambulations, his constitutional airing at the dread hour

“When graveyards yawn and graves give up their dead.”

Every man, woman, and child of the neighbourhood knew the old Squire and his ghostly excursions; they had known him in life, but that did not prevent them (indeed it added greatly to it) fearing a sight of him now that he was no longer in the flesh. No terror could be greater, no fear more paralysing than a sight now would be of his once jovial countenance.

There had been much talking, whispering behind their hands, and shakings and waggings of their heads at the goings on there had been at the Hall, when the old Squire reigned. He had been a hunting, shooting, card-playing, turf-betting, carousing Squire, and the Hall had been the scene of many a carousal, and the subject of many a whispered gruesome tale. When the house party arrived for the shooting, the hunting, or



perhaps Christmas festivities, expectations rose high and were ready for almost any tale that was told, whether with foundation or wholly the offspring of some fertile brain. When loud-voiced, drinking, swearing men, and flaunting, bold-faced women (the scum of Dublin society 'twas said), came to hold their revels in this quiet corner of the earth, it was enough to make honest folks hide their heads, and shrink and quake in their beds with fear lest the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah should come upon them for the blasphemy and evil deeds of these people. Often the lights never went out in the Hall till the sun rose high in the heavens; and the rattle of dice and roll of billiard balls counted out the hours of the night till dawn.

Many a whispered story of how the Squire could not sleep in his bed of nights, but went walking up and down stairs, out and in of rooms, with a pair of loaded pistols, one in each hand, at full cock, to defy anybody or *anything* that might challenge him, or else perhaps to relieve his not very clean conscience or over-taxed, superstitious mind. Tales of other kinds of footsteps, besides the Squire's, wandering up and down along corridors, stepping out of windows, or going through locked doors, and of unearthly lights and noises till nobody could sleep, and of the Squire coming to the servants' quarters and asking them if they heard aught, or if they would like night-lights.—Gruesome stories that made a creepy sensation come over the listeners and made them dread going out after dark except in batches, or with lanterns, and made such people as Watson tremble and quake at the sight of their own shadows.

Upon one of these festive occasions—the shooting season,—a large party had arrived at the Hall, and the jollifications, orgies, and merry-makings were in full swing; rich were the revels and gay the sports indulged in by one and all. The dog-carts and traps, which had been sent out to meet the sportsmen one afternoon, had arrived as the twilight deepened into night, and were emptying out upon the courtyard pavement their weary occupants amidst much confusion, loud talking, swearing, and laughter. Horses, traps, dogs, grooms, masters, all were a disorderly jumble, very much excited, and a good deal fuddled, no doubt, from the liberal potations at their pic-nic luncheon amongst the heather and gorse upon the hill-sides. Suddenly a sharp shot rang out, and all was still—a single shot—an ominous stillness—then arose a babble of voices like the roar of many waters, and amidst the din and uproar, the pandemonium let loose, a cry, “The Squire is shot!” “The Squire is shot.”

The jovial Squire, host of the entertainment, leader of the sports, in his own courtyard amongst his guests and his people—Who could have fired the shot? Was it accident or malice intent? The light was waning, and none could be certain from what quarter the report had come; they could not see distinctly, and indeed if it had been broad day, it is doubtful whether they could have seen even then any better. Some were not very sure whether their guns had been loaded or not; but still, they thought, a man must know if the gun in his own hand had gone off, and many a half tipsy brain had a glimmer of unspoken suspicion which grew stronger and stronger as the wine fumes passed away. The Squire’s



son and a dark-browed keeper were very near at hand to help the Squire. They had not shown any signs of knowing where the shot came from or much anxiety to find out ; their first attention of course being the fallen Squire, and their greatest anxiety had been to get him indoors and to find medical assistance ; the black-browed keeper sprang into the first trap, and rushed off for the nearest doctor.

Consternation held gossiping tongues paralysed for a breathless moment, and then the babble let loose, every tongue said just as much as ever it choose, and it choose to say till every possible thought, from the wildest to the most inane that the brain of its owner could form, was exhausted. Every tongue, masculine and feminine, ran riot, for no matter how high the revels at the Hall had been, or were supposed to have been, none had ended in this terrible manner. All that had yet passed had been but child's play compared to this tragic event, and terror appeared on the faces of even the gossips, for they were convinced that it was a judgment from the All Powerful Hand that had ended the life of the riotous, Squire, that had laid him low while he was yet hale and hearty, and wanted many years of having reached the allotted span of life allowed to man.

The Squire was not quite dead ; he lingered a few days in intense pain ; the ball could not be extracted, and the agony made him roar and storm at his attendants. This painful lingering gave him time to put his affairs in order, part of which were directions for his own funeral ; and these orders were that it should be at midnight, and, as it was the dark of the moon, there should be a torch-light procession.

This gave Mother Grundy and her votaries yet another morsel of food, but even they grew weary discussing its wonders, and, not being able to come to a reason for this last vagary—that is, a reason after their own liking, for, of course, they gave slight heed to the voice that suggested pomp, grandeur, solemnity to be the motive power in Squire Aylesbury when he gave this last order—one and all declared he would come back, and right enough he did—or they said so, which is just as good. *Ne c'est pas, mon amie?*—as you shall hear presently. And likewise it prevented any examination of the authorities into the affair. It was called an accident, and was smoothed over as well as possible, and an accident it remained.

The young Squire, how could he be suspected? Such a nice young man as he was, so very different in every way from his father; so quiet, so smooth, so gracious, so gentle, so charming in manner, and so pious too! Why, there could not possibly be a better man. He held cottage meetings and religious services for the people, and to hear him preach was a treat, so it was said. His voice fell upon their ears melodious, soothing, rich, sweet, seductive as the silvery music of rippling, gently-falling waters, and his charities to the poor were talked of much by the people. But still and withal the old man will out, and sometimes this good young Squire showed a glimpse of the hoof and a tiny curl of the tail appeared. Once in a while he cast off the hypocritical cloak of sanctimonious twaddle in which he had himself enveloped, and raved and swore in savage fits of temper, thrashed his servants, threatened to throw them in the lake, whether to drown or



only a cooling ducking neither he nor they waited to consider. His servants were continually changing—constantly coming and going. When these fits were over he would again deck himself out in his cloak, harmoniously attune his voice to its very nicest intonation, and go out a-preaching.

And the black-browed keeper! Here was a servant who never evoked his master's wrath. *He* was never dismissed from his service nor dismissed himself, but was a faithful, trusted, and confidential companion. But once he must have fallen into the unseen hands at the Horse's Saddle, for late one night his horse brought him into his master's yard horribly mutilated, and huddled up into a shapeless, unconscious heap in the bottom of the broken and splintered trap, the horse covered with mud and foam. A horrible gash across his black brow, over one eye, down his cheek to the very edge of the jaw—in after days a most shocking disfigurement to a very ill-favoured face. His master nursed and tended him as a favourite and trusted servant should be tended, until his recovery. But to this day none know how this came about. If it was the work of the unseen hands, then it remains a secret between himself and these hands, for to no human ear did he ever disclose the true account.

Folks said that it was in the execution of some of his master's services, but if it was, his master had no desire to hear the details of the expedition, and so it ever remains locked up in the bosom of the black-browed keeper.

Many, many years have passed since then. The young Squire is no longer young, but well-nigh as old

as his father was at the time of the accident. His beautiful dark hair has snow sprinkled plentifully amongst its wavy undulations, and, although his voice is still suave and melodious, there is an habitual fierceness and restlessness in his eyes and manner, which unmistakably indicates an unquenchable fire burning within. Of late he has resumed shooting, which he had laid aside after his father's death, and is to be seen with guns, dogs, and keepers tramping over furze, rock, and heather-capped hills, in search of sport.

The voice of rumour still busies itself, with many upliftings of hands and eyes, and shakings of the head, with mysterious whisperings, hints, insinuations, and suggestions as to the doings at the Hall.

The winds bear the tale that of nights the Squire cannot sleep in his bed, but, like his father of old, wanders from room to room, through the corridors, up and down staircases, with loaded fire-arms—wanders like an unhappy soul in the shades and gloom of awful night—wanders up and down! up and down! up and down!

Is it any wonder then that Watson, who had heard all these things from his cradle up—when he was an infant in arms, a boy, a youth, a man—heard them vouched by strong men and weak, by mothers, wives, maidens; heard them told with dozens of a like nature on drear winter nights—when all loved to relate and to hear, and quaked while they listened and enjoyed the excitement raised by each tale as it fell with varied powers of descriptive eloquence from the lips of each narrator; he himself being of a peculiarly sensitive, superstitious nature, is it any wonder that now, when



just within a quarter of a mile of the Church, as he looks at his watch by the pale gleam of the moon, through a rift in the clouds, and discovers that it is just five minutes to twelve, that the blood surges madly through his brain, with a heavy, dull, sickening sensation, and that every beat of his heart throbs great, choking throbs in his throat, that an icy chill passes over him; that his hair begins to stiffen and stand erect, and that cold perspiration bursts out in great beads upon his brow, as his horse bears him nearer and nearer?

The moon has entirely disappeared behind the snow-clouds that are piling up heavier and blacker, and the gloom of the way is intensified by the overshadowing trees of Squire Aylesbury's demesne, and to his excited fancy every waving branch, moved by the gusty wind, looks like human arms reaching out towards him, and the moaning and sobbing, and doleful whispers sound like voices superhuman.

The Church looms like a great phantom as his horse bears him nearer and still nearer. As he approaches the entrance, the light leaves his eyes; he feels his poor steed tremble beneath him, and stand stock still. Terror possessed both man and beast—it may have been the sympathetic electric current, transmitting the feeling from one to the other—the fear of the man to the horse, or the keener sense of sight in the horse in darkness apprising the man of his dread of the unknown. One paralysing moment, that seemed an hour of agony, so intense, so tight the tension to which he was worked up—one breathless moment the horse was rivetted to the earth, and Watson *saw* a faint bluish glimmer—a

peculiar light—such as he had never seen before anywhere, flickering and wavering, gradually becoming more and more distinct and clearer, and in its midst the old Squire, bluff and hearty as he had been in life—in scarlet hunting coat and cap, riding boots, and a heavy riding crop in his hand, with his jolly old face turned full upon Watson. But only for an instant. The Squire, surrounded by the halo, moved over the road, his silver spurs ringing upon the ground as he walked, and disappeared through a little wicket into the Aylesbury grounds. The horse reared wildly, plunging madly forward, and, in his frenzied terror, never drew breath nor Watson rein till both arrived weak and exhausted, the horse with his nose close up to his own stable door.

Before all these tales were told, and while Watson was assuring them of the veracity of his vision, and the attentive audience were becoming duly impressed, the men had finished tea, and most of them lighted their pipes, so that each story as it was told and every separate figure therein seemed to rise up and float in the air upon clouds of blue tobacco smoke, dancing an aerial ballet, like *un joli* scene in a pantomime.

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## CHAPTER IV.

THE GHOST AT THE CROSS-ROADS FARM, AND GRACE'S  
RECEPTION OF IT.

THE two maids stood near the door, their plump, rosy faces showing signs of open-eyed wonder and fear. When the men at last rose and left the kitchen, Minnie, the prettiest and plumpest of the two, asked Miss Grace if she ever heard a banshee. Grace said no; nor ever heard of anyone who had either. Minnie stoutly declared that one had come to their house when they lived in "Lout" (Co. Louth). When her little brother had been dying, her mother had seen a wee, wee woman, with a great white winding-sheet about her, going round the house, crying in a strange voice, "Augh-a-nee, the poor banshee! Augh-a-nee, the poor banshee! Augh-a-nee, the poor banshee!"

Minnie discovered as she was thus cheerfully chatting that she had neglected to bring in the usual spring water, which it was her duty to do before dark, and that she would now have to go a considerable distance in the dark to get it. She caught up a couple of buckets and begged Rose, her companion, to accompany her. They both set forth through the snow to bring it, with quaking hearts, and furtive glances, and strongly defined fear in every movement.

Grace stood in the hall talking to Mr. and Mrs. Morton. She had a pile of books and papers in her arms, which she was taking to the sitting-room, when the door opened sharply, and Watson, who was supposed to have gone home for the night, appeared, his face pale, and an excited, burning light in his eyes. He declared that if he never was to go home he would not go through the Beech Wood that night (another of the ubiquitous haunted spots). He would sit up at the fire all night first. His master and mistress, seeing his unsettled state, assured him kindly that a bed should be made for him in the harness room. Mr. Morton told him to "sit by the fire with the cheerful company, man," and placed a chair for him. Mrs. Morton told him she had something for him to do—a little job she had on hands—and she just needed his help (a kindly invented job), but Watson gladly sat down, and signified his willingness to do anything.

In the corner by his side was a wicker cradle, and the baby, a golden-haired, rosy-cheeked darling, sleeping soundly. At that moment it flung its tiny hands out upon the coverlet, and stirred with a little cry. Watson, glad of occupation, gently rocked the cradle, and, looking at the soft, flushed face of the sleeping babe, soothed and toned down his unstrung nerves.

Sleep, gentle babe,  
There are angels around  
To guard and protect thee,  
Sleep, sweet and sound.

Again the door opened with a bang! In rushed the two maids, stumbling over their buckets, breathless



and laughing, they dashed the door, shut after them almost upon their own heels, and Minnie declared, "In troth, Miss Grace, we could not go, we were that 'feared.'" The two of them stood laughing immoderately. At that moment a dull, heavy knocking came upon the hall door. Grace, who was standing just behind it, listening to the girls, instinctively drew back the handle, and disclosed upon the steps a tall man wrapped up to the eyes, and so covered with snow that he seemed a shapeless mass, and looked more like a great polar bear than anything else. Just an instant was he disclosed, for Grace, with a wild shriek, dashed to the door direct in his face before he had time to speak, and rushed into the sitting-room, leaving her books and papers flying through the hall and scattered upon the floor.

Mrs. Morton, who had been standing beside her, and was not so much affected by the stories (it was not the first by many times she had heard them), again opened the door. Mr. Morton coming to see what it was all about, turned higher the large globular hall lamp of stained glass suspended from the ceiling. The bear still stood upon the doorstep, shaking with laughter, which the necessity for speaking helped him to overcome, but merriment beamed in his eye still as he raised his hat and begged to be excused for his intrusion, but he was afraid he had lost his way, he being a stranger, the night so dark, the snow so heavy, his horse had become exhausted. He had been plunging through the great, heavy snow-drifts for more than an hour. Where they were he knew not—how far from, or how near to, his destination.

The voice was a deep one, with a rich inflection; the smile a winning one; the jaded horse standing with drooping head behind its master, a picture of dejection. A horse that has lost hope is such a pitiable object, an utterly wretched looking creature, that would melt a heart of stone. Mrs. Morton's heart went out to it. Its master's felt tender towards it, and he drew the bridle rein which he had over his arm tighter. The horse came lazily up close, stretching out his neck to receive the caressing pat it knew was going to be bestowed, and returned it by rubbing its nose against his snow-covered coat-sleeve in token of perfect love and faith. The stranger further explained that he was bound for Mossleigh Rectory. He had been staying with some friends at a distance for several weeks, and had hoped to reach the rectory on Christmas Eve before dark, but the snow-drifts had been so deep in places, the storm bringing night so quickly, the strange road seemed so much longer than he had expected; "Your Irish miles are so deuced long," he ended, with a rueful laugh, "that here we are, not fit for much more of it."

"Ay," said Mr. Morton, "we don't stint the measure. If the way is not good we make up for it in the measure and give a good piece in."

"Well," said the stranger, "your piece has landed us here instead of at the Rectory; perhaps you would be kind enough to direct me or send some one to show me the way. If it is not far, walking might be the safest way, one cannot see an arm's length in front of them. The Ladybird has got more of this than I care to give her; she is a valuable as well as a favourite horse, and I should not like anything to befall her," he gently



patted the nose thrust into his hands, as he spoke, the beautiful creature throwing up its head and rattling its silver bits.

Mr. Morton looked doubtfully out into the blackness and shook his head, thousands of silent snowflakes fluttered down light as swan's-down where the lamp shed a patch of light from the open door.

"It's my opinion," he said, "both The Ladybird and you must remain here all night. It is three good miles to the Rectory, and not a worse road in all the counties of Ulster, not the design of a fence on either side of it, and the bog sunk several yards below the road on both sides; wind swept and full of ruts, you are more than fortunate you did not get so far without knowing it. You certainly would have come to grief; a false step on the part of your horse would have thrown both to certain destruction."

The stranger hesitated, turning towards Mrs. Morton. "The trouble, the inconvenience," he said; "you are more than kind, and to tell the truth I should be very glad, I am more than half frozen myself, but should be sorry to——"

Mrs. Morton hastened to assure him that any friend of the Rector's was very welcome, and the trouble would only be a pleasure; that it would be foolish to venture further on such a night; she could assure him of a comfortable bed, a good fire, a wholesome meal for both.

"And both in dire need, my dear madam," he said laughing.

Mr. Morton, declaring it would be worse than foolish, summoned Watson to take his horse, and waited to help his guest off with his snow-covered wraps.

But he lingered to give Watson instructions with regard to The Ladybird. Give her a good rubbing down, my man, and something warm and a good bed.

"Trust Watson," said Mr. Morton, "Watson loves a good horse better than his fellowmen, or with very few exceptions, and often declares them to be a more trusty friend than many a man he knows; his stables are his kingdom, and he glories in his reign." Mr. Morton is right. Watson leads the horse away, and establishes him in a loose box, gives him such a rubbing down as leaves the animal glowing, covers him up with a light warm rug, gives him a good feed and a bed clean and dry up to the knee; passes a hand over its gracefully proportioned limbs, and eyes it critically and approvingly; his touch is the touch of the person who loves the thing it fondles, his eye has the look that seeks good qualities, not faults, in the object thus critically examined. The Ladybird snores contentedly into her corn box while she disposes of its contents, resting herself with a comfortable occasional stamp; between whiles casting a friendly glance upon her groom from her beautifully formed, bright eye.

Watson has in his possession a good whip, long and strong, but not for the correction of the animals under his charge. Watson never commits the degraded, bestial offence of thrashing his master's horses; he guides by love and a firm will, not by a lax hand and a cut of the whip. His whip is simply, solely, and professedly for the correction of sundry small boys who dearly love to play antics that sadly chafe and irritate high tempered horses, oftentimes turning them into vicious ones. But they know full well to beware of



Watson's whip; and that if they are caught digressing, they will feel the strength of his hand; they know him to be a very dragon of the stables, and they his natural enemy. A stable boy after his own heart very soon became as gravely sedate, and his conversation as owlshly wise as that of a patriarchal monkey or his own grandfather. He seemingly learns at once that very difficult old saw, an old head upon young shoulders, and immediately adopts the role of a sage; walking wisely, talking wisely, looking still more wisely. His criticisms (like his master's of course) being oracular and not on any terms to be disputed, upholding that master as an infallible authority, as if the very gods had spoken.

Watson is a very head of wisdom; in words always, but not in deeds sometimes, poor man! as we have just seen. However, work is good for both man and beast, if tempered wisely with moderation, and so Watson, in the service of love and duty, his mind and hands both wholesomely occupied, forgets the terrors of his vision, or *deceptio visus*, his nervous system becomes more settled, and his equilibrium more fully restored,—*le brave homme!*

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## CHAPTER V.

THE GUEST.—GRACE WARDWOOD.—WHAT THEY ARE, WHAT THEY THINK, AND WHAT THEY DREAM OF.



R. NOEL CHESTER, when he is divested of his heavy fur collared coat and wraps, and standing before the huge fire thawing himself, is both a young and a handsome man. Scarcely over middle height, slender, but with deep chest, muscular, well set shoulders, and gracefully posed intellectual head; pale, clearly cut handsome features; finely set, well opened eyes of a rich dark velvety brown, a few shades softer than his clearly pencilled brows and crisp curly hair. Quite handsome, but not the type that lacks brains or tends towards effeminacy or vanity, there was not a grain of the *petit maître* about him; but that amount of self-respect which is much to be admired and greatly to be desired in both men and women, the amount which prevents slovenliness in dress and untidiness in habit, and which not only assures self-respect, but also assures the respect of your fellow-men. Both appearance and manners were most prepossessing, the latter unaffected and gracious, none the less frank and pleasant that he took in every detail of his surroundings, forming a pretty fair estimate of his host as he chatted, perfectly well aware that Mr. Morton is performing the same little office for him, and which it behoves him to do, of the stranger he takes within his gates.



It is not long before a friendly footing is established. Noël explains that he is the future brother-in-law of the Rector, only son and heir of a Manchester cotton merchant, and whom Mr. Morton has heard called a cotton king, who could buy up princes, whose house was old and long established, and possessed of that rare treasure which men call luck, all things prospering in his hands as if he were the happy possessor of the long and vainly sought philosopher's stone, or as if he had had bestowed upon him the gift Bacchus bestowed upon Midas, that of turning everything he touched into gold. From all this Mr. Morton concluded that they were people who personally superintended their own business, and had made their little pile and knew how to take care of it when made. Mr. Morton knew that when rumour says millions, one may safely count upon thousands, and when it says thousands, hundreds only must be counted upon, and so on down the whole scale of figures.

Noël looked decidedly a well-to-do young gentleman, but he had neither the arrogance of self-acquired wealth, nor the appearance of seedy prodigality. He further explains that he ought to have been at the Rectory the preceding day, but the people with who he had been staying several miles away, had pressed and persuaded him into staying for some special entertainment, and thus left him travelling on Christmas Eve, benighted and tempest-tossed in the most unseasonable weather in a wild Irish bog, or what might have proved one if he had not had the good fortune to be taken for a ghost, and happen upon his present very pleasant quarters.

All this time Mrs. Morton and her maids have been bestirring themselves to good purpose, and very soon

had the satisfaction of seeing the visitor seated before a dainty and appetizing repast. Noël had what he himself would have termed a glorious appetite; his gastronomical organs were in perfect order, and not the faintest symptoms of dyspepsia or any other form of organic disarrangement to which mankind is heir. Indeed he had for sometime previously felt the pangs of unrequited hunger, and a scene such as the present would have been most acceptable, it being well nigh seven hours since he had luncheon; and what with the cold, the long ride, one thing heaped upon another, he had more than reached the stage necessary for the thorough appreciation of a good meal. He was not by any means one of those who unduly love the good things of the table, indeed nothing he considered more unpleasant than sitting down to table without a pleasant sensation of hunger, for piquant sauce, or crowding into the day many unnecessary little meals as some people unwisely do by the name of appetizers, or in dread of having to wait fifteen minutes or half-an-hour longer than usual—and if they are going out to dine, fortify themselves with cups of tea, sandwiches, bread-and-butter, fruit, and what not by way of “treatment,”—such treatment is unquestionably doubtful, even for the most healthy, how much more for those who are not robust. But, this may also be a protest against the unpunctual, by those who are blessed with the gift of arranging and guiding their affairs smoothly, harmoniously to the tune of regularity and punctuality.

A great man has remarked that the bestowal of intellectual gifts ceases with our birth; that, once the baby's eyes open upon this troublous world, their owner



will never be possessed of another gift, and it all depends upon circumstances whether those gifts of which they are possessed are developed and cultivated, or whether they lie dormant, unfruitful, useless.

What a misfortune it is to those who have missed the gift of punctuality; what a hurrying, flurrying time they have of it, coming up breathless, flushed, excited, half-laughing, wholly-vexed, or fractiously complaining of the thousand and one duties that delayed them, accusing everybody of imaginary things; flurry, scold, fuss, rush; themselves and everybody else put out; the end of it all being that they are just in time to feel all the vexatious disappointment of being too late. But it does not cure them; they never will be cured; they will keep your dinner waiting a full half-hour—more, indeed, if you are foolish enough to wait. But they are otherwise such agreeable, pleasant, nice people, that you do strive to overlook this one failing. They will come in beaming all over, quite unconscious of the storm brewing, the righteous indignation and wrath of the punctual, the epicure, the unfortunate with the delicate digestion, the sensible, well-balanced, who all know that every moment's delay hopelessly spoils the simplest dinner.

But there are worse people than this cheerful person—there are those who wilfully delay, come at their own convenience, insolently assuming that it is they who are of importance, not you, or your guests, or your dinner, who display anything but a smiling countenance, a brow like a thunder-cloud about to burst, if there is even a gentle suggestion that they have kept everybody waiting; and, if you want amity at your board,

you must smile sweetly over the cold sauces or toasted meats, blame your cook, not your impertinent guest; pretend they are such nice people, so charming, so delightful, so everything, that it is perfect and correct—lie under the blame of having a bad dinner, a worse cook, and that you yourselves are a ridiculous host and hostess, who do not know a good dinner, and are utterly incapable of having one.

But, if it is a misfortune to be unpunctual, what is it to have an overdose of it?—your own share, and your neighbours', too; to be a martinet—a fierce, inexorable, unbending, unrelenting martinet—who *will* make all the world dance their hornpipes to the tickings of the clock, or know the reason why. Infatuated with his own laws and customs, he swears that his is the only way to health, compels his family servants, friends, neighbours, all, to give up any little desires they may chance to have, and submit themselves to his tyrannous rule. Not a second too late, not a second too soon, just on the stroke of the clock, or he would be like an arbitrary friend of ours, who had worried his household into a frenzied state with his severe orders. His unfortunate cook, being one of those individuals well-nigh devoid of the gift of punctuality, but being desirous, above all things, to please, had exerted her energies, wildly resolved to be in time, and exerted them to such good purpose that she had succeeded beyond her hopes, and triumphantly served up dinner (*en famille*) just eight minutes and a half too soon. But she reckoned without her host; our nice friend *would not* sit down to dinner because, forsooth, it would spoil his everlasting digestion. No doubt, he was right;



only an ostrich would be capable of disposing of the task he gave those poor organs to do.

If you go to visit a martinet, perhaps he has some little duty to perform, and will come to you presently. You sit and wait, wait, wait; the clock ticks, ticks, ticks; you grow miserable, and wish, withal, you had not come.

Your friend on the other side of the wall calmly writes a note to a person who does not expect it, and which could have waited a couple of hours or days, or even weeks, for that matter; but what of that, it is all in the day's work. This creature of order and rule has laid out his day's work, and will not put aside any of it for you, however trifling it may be, and is quite amazed at you if you have only a short quarter of an hour more to stay. He is quite at leisure, quite ready, *now*, to chat to you, and highly offended (if the martinet be a lady) that you cannot wait till she lays a family tea for you, or puts the babies to sleep, or feeds her pet chickens, or washes up her best china, or lights the lamps all over the house, or makes a nice salad, which she is sure you will be delighted with, and all of which she never dreams of letting anybody else do, or for one moment thinks of putting off these small trifles until after you are gone.

You wished you had not come at such a busy time (but you are wrong, they are always so there); your hosts wonder why you did come, if you had not a minute to stay (you have stayed more than sixty minutes). Nobody is pleased, nobody is satisfied! and yet it is such a nice thing to be in good time, to have things neat and orderly, your time well spent, your work well done, half-an-hour to chat to a friend, with-

out putting the whole machinery of your household all awry.

It is that marvellous treasure, Forethought, and not rules and regulations only, that accomplishes this much-to-be desired result. Forethought, order, punctuality in moderation, and guided by good sense, is the way to health, comfort, happiness, so far as we have the management of it. If we indulge, we suffer; if we endure privation, the result is no more to be desired. We may look with wonder, and even amazement, upon the ascetic; but it is only wise to recognise that each and all of us, being entrusted with the care of an excellent animal, it is but our duty to feed and otherwise care for it—to the very best of our ability. We may admire very greatly the self-denying qualities of the ascetic, but imitate it only to the extent that saves us from becoming grossly indulgent—a vulgar gastronomist—and not to privation, for the animal appetite must be satisfied with wholesome food to keep up the physical strength and health. To this end, also, order and regularity tend; but must ever walk hand-in-hand with moderation, sense, and forethought.

Noël felt that the contents of his plate at this moment were infinitely desirable, and the daintily-appointed table promised gratification of the very natural desire. Mr. Morton liked to keep his own table supplied with as much home produce as possible, and Mrs. Morton had the gift of presenting everything to its best advantage, serving it up well cooked and dainty. Her standard of the art of cuisine was a high one. She had found it defined thus by one of the very greatest writers of the nineteenth century:—



“Cooking means the knowledge of Medea, and of Circe, and of Calypso, and of Helen, and of Rebekah, and of the Queen of Sheba. It means the knowledge of all herbs, and fruits, and balms, and spices; and of all that is healing and sweet in fields and groves, and savouring in meats; it means carefulness, and inventiveness, and watchfulness, and willingness, and readiness of appliance; it means the economy of your great-grandmothers, and the science of modern chemists; it means much tasting, and no wasting; it means English thoroughness, and French art, and Arabian hospitality: it means, in fine, that you are to be perfectly and always ‘ladies,’ ‘loaf-givers;’ and as you are to see imperatively that everybody has something pretty to put on, so you are to see yet more imperatively that everybody has something nice to eat.”

Mrs. Morton believed that, if you set up a low standard for yourself, the results are mean; but if you, instead, set up the noblest and most lofty, no matter what the art, you will, in the end, even if you do not reach to the perfection of your master, yet partake of the tone, and your work have something of the nobility, of the noble example, of the lofty model, ever before your eyes. She knew how to cook a fowl so as to retain the juices, and not reduce it to something resembling a dried stick; so before her guest are placed succulent slices of turkey and cold pink ham, with potato chips, and excellent sauce; a glass filled with sticks of white celery, a jar of home-made honey, produce of their own bees, and sweet golden butter; a fruit tart, a slice of hot plum-pudding, a glass dish of custard, followed by well-made, hot, clear coffee; and last, but not by any means of the least consideration, a little pile of home-made soda cakes—that is, *real* soda cakes, such as only the farmer’s wife knows how to bake—and not all of them

can attain to the kind of which we know, light as a sponge cake, but beautifully white, and about two inches thick, composed simply of flour, soda, salt, and buttermilk, tossed by a dexterous hand, and baked upon a griddle by an expert.

Mrs. Morton felt that she need not be ashamed of the fare she had provided for her guest; and he—entirely forgetful of him who, most wealthy, not only of Britain, but of all the world, dined *from choice* upon a crust of stale bread and a glass of water\*—satisfied nature pleasantly, to the gratification of his hospitable entertainers, while he becomes better acquainted with them—and between whiles eyes little Georgie, who, in return, not only eyes, but open eyes him with much curiosity, and clearly expressed wonderment.

Grace Wardwood is not visible. After her fit of terror and craven flight, she has hidden herself away from the sight of the stranger. The drawing-room is her especial charge. There she keeps her birds, her flowers, her books, her music, and all the little refinements with which the feminine sex love to surround themselves. Mrs. Morton is much too busy a personage to trouble herself with the care of a drawing-room, and has handed it over to Grace since she first came. Her dairies, her pantries, her storerooms, her kitchens, her household, her husband, and her children, she declares, with a laugh, are quite as much as one woman can reasonably be expected to look after and keep in order; and it is only those who have none of these who have time for drawing-rooms—so that room is Grace's favourite haunt: not that she confines herself to it. Every

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\* Baron Rothschild.



room in the house bears the marks of her artistic taste and skilful fingers: the glow of scarlet berries, the glisten of holly leaves, the graceful trail and wreath of ivy in every corner, showing up dark, and glossy, and festive in the lamplight show, where she has worked her magic in honour of the Yuletide. But this room shows more of her individuality than any of the others, because less frequented by the family. She has put a light to the already-laid fire, and stands upon the rug before it, looking into the flames as they dart up long tongues of blue, and yellow, and red, hungrily seeking what they may devour in their mad race upwards, only to lose themselves in the depths and blackness of the wide chimney, and the still gloomier and bleaker darkness of the night beyond.

But Grace only sees in them pleasant warmth, dancing frolics, crackling, mirthful laughter, casting lights and shadows upon the room behind her, playing hide-and-seek amongst her treasures, creating forms in the corners and recesses, peopling the room with weird, fanciful beings, as if she held a vespertine revel with the spirits who had stepped down from her bookshelves and from her picture frames, and were frisking about in the way which the "wee people" used to do upon the hearthstone of those who obeyed their requirements, and swept up that hearth clean and tidy for them: so that when they did come it was in readiness for the mazy dance of their twinkling feet—glided and flickered, playing antics with the tables and chairs, verifying the saying that "a little nonsense now and then" is appreciated by the "most potent, grave and reverend seigniors." For who, think ye, has she up

there, and who is it may possibly, for all we know, dance and play like the elves, upon the hearthstone of their votaries; and why should not they, as well as the "good people" thus reward those who have obeyed their injunctions and followed their precepts?

She has up there Ruskin, Thackeray, Dickens, Beaconsfield, Kingsley, Elliot, Gordon Cumming, Tennyson, Browning, and many others—sweet, pure, good food for the young mind, and who knew their fellows too well not to know that everything in nature—people and things—love a little dancing, a little frolic, a little joy, a little mirth. Are they not everlastingly telling it to us and bestowing it upon us? And why should not they dance in the shadows, or, at least, why should we not see them there, people the corners with those who are best able to show and tell us most of the lights and shadows of this earth and the creatures thereof?

Grace lights a handsome standard lamp near the piano, which lessens the shadows, and casts a warm, crimson glow over the room, and shows a little more of its contents, exhibiting the profusion of plants and flowers with which it is decorated—a perfect little bower of palms and aurelias and ferns, with one gorgeously blooming azalea mingling its exquisite perfume with that of many blooming hyacinths of every hue—soft pink, creamy white, rich purple, primrose yellow, deep rose. A pair of pretty love-birds disturbed from their dose, begin to osculate, to play at dove-kissing and all sorts of affectionate endearments, to which they seem to be addicted beyond all other feathered creatures; a tiny canary-bird, rolled up into a golden ball, perched upon one slender leg, blinks an



eye, thinks the sun is rising, bursts into a vigorous carol, in which he is joined for a second by a little goldfinch in the opposite window, but the latter, finding itself more hungry than musical, proceeds to regale itself upon the contents of its seed-drawer, taking a little exercise between whiles in the way of much hopping and fluttering and pecking; but dicky when he finds his mistake, tucks his head under his wing and bobs off to sleep again, after a protesting rustle of his wings at the deception practised upon him.

Grace stands upon the hearthrug, unconsciously intently observing the workings of the ormolu clock before her—a tall, stately, graceful, finely-proportioned figure; her small head reared with a queenly air and crowned with masses of brown, wavy hair; her features beautifully formed; her colouring delicately and exquisitely tinted. The scarlet blouse which she wears, with a touch of white lace at the throat and wrists, seems to give a glow to her handsome, violet grey eyes and to heighten the flush upon her cheeks. An unusual amount of sensitiveness about the lips, combined with the vivid blushing upon the most trifling occasions, bespeak the inborn, highly-strung, nervous, poetical temperament.

This same sensitiveness causes her much vexation, and she often asks of her sister why she cannot be as calm and self-possessed, as cool and unconcerned and lacking in self-consciousness, as the generality of her acquaintances, many of them much younger than herself; and finds little consolation in the assurance that time only will cure it, that as she grows older it will pass away, and that rubbing against this harsh world is the sure

means of toning down that—alas!—rare gift, maidenly modesty—the genuine blush, emblem of an innocent life, a pure mind, a gentle heart; and, as Mr. Morton tells her with true brotherly frankness, get rid of being “thin-skinned” by getting up a good stock of self-conceit, “cheek,” and egotism, incessantly exhibiting an overweening self-sufficiency and self-assertiveness, thereby showing superiority to everyday mortals, in-somuch that she herself cannot do or say anything but that which is *perfect, matchless, unequalled*, and, indeed, neither allowing nor listening to anyone who has the audacity to attempt to equal it in her presence. That, he says, seems to him to be the way present-day folks get over their undue modesty and bashfulness, and grow “thick-skinned,” self-assured, and self-satisfied.

Grace finds good advices excellent things, but not always practicable, for telling her to get over it does not bring her there, nor, indeed, in any wise help her do it. If she knew what a pretty thing it was she would not have felt so distressed, or, if she had known what some people would give to be able to call up a blush when occasion required (people who had utterly forgotten the way, or had never known it), she might have felt more complacent. But as it was, she considered it a vexatious thing, to say the least of it, that her musical powers should be in subservience to her blushes, and that a little too much colour should be able to almost entirely wrest away her powers of execution, her trembling fingers refusing to acknowledge their cunning, or to do credit to their training-masters, when other ears than her own are present; and that it is only when she arrives at the frenzied stage of distress



that it all comes back with a rush, and she leaves her audience silent, breathless with the exquisiteness of her productions.

It is seldom one hears such music as Grace Wardwood's; *recherché*, dream-like, vibrating, rich, soft, sweet tones; swelling, grand, full, magnificent chords; rippling, running, tinkling, murmuring, rushing notes, as if her very soul were in them, speaking of love to her hushed birds, her fragrant flowers, her dead yet ever-living companions, her books. In the twilight Grace revelled. When none were by to hear she poured forth all her power, allowed it to ooze from her finger tips, as at no other time. When criticism was by, her gift froze, withdrew itself into its shell from such uncongenial company; treasured itself up for the time when it should be drawn forth by true sympathy, as a thing of goodness and beauty, which giveth perpetual delight.

The opening of the door disturbs her reverie. Mr. and Mrs. Morton came in, accompanied by Noël Chester and little Georgie, who objects loudly to beauty-sleeps, especially if they are only to be had before the time of family retirement—and if Georgie had to depend when he is grown up into a beau upon the beauty thus obtained, it is greatly to be feared that his attractions would be nil—but Georgie is a little man of great faith, and means to let his looks take care of themselves, at least until he has grown up.

Grace feels a violent desire for a moment to pray of the earth to open and offer her shelter from the twinkle in the visitor's eye—a twinkle which presently changes to another kind of look—not exactly merriment, but a desire that grows, the more it is defeated, into a feverish

desire, and makes him well-nigh forget to answer his host once or twice, in his endeavours to get Grace to look at him.

Who is it can say why a man chooses a wife—why young men and women fall in love, or when? Who shall declare that love at first sight is not the best kind of love, or that it is the best, or that it takes time to ripen the genuine article? The appreciation of fine qualities, forsooth! It is neither from reason, nor common sense, nor any one of the many excellent qualities possessed by, or not possessed by, the object of their fancy. The enchanter drops a drop of his magic dew into their eyes, and they are in love. They know not why they became so, or how, or for what reason, but there they are. They might as well have closed their eyes and played grab, and have been just as well off. They deem they have chosen wisely, calmly, judiciously, and, perhaps, with an eye to the main chance; but, behold ye! they have only, after all, played at the game at which every creature plays—the time and chance which happeneth to all.

It is not to be supposed that Noël Chester sat down and told himself he was in love, or that Grace Wardwood told herself she was in love.

There are some men so constituted that it takes them ten, twelve, fifteen, twenty, aye, twenty-five years, before they become convinced sufficiently, and only the fates know what then convinces them, for certainly no one else could, looking on with the clear eye of the unprejudiced observer. The only conclusion that can become to is, they have got a bee in their bonnet, and it must have taken all those years to develop the



chrysalis into the pretty little winged emblem of love.

But it was not that Noël was so procrastinating, as that it was only that he had not time to think about himself; he was so busy thinking about Grace Wardwood, whilst talking to Mrs. Morton, and his mind went off on so many private expeditions over the matter, that it was quite distracting, for while gazing at Grace's downcast eyes, watching to see when they should be raised, he was liable to miss the first part of his hostess's sentences, and it was only by catching the last word or two, and guessing at the rest, that he saved himself from confusion, and sometimes verged upon irrelevancies.

However, Mr. and Mrs. Morton chatted away about the Rector, his foibles and hobbies, the most pronounced of which was his beautiful rosarium, in the interest of which Grace forgets to think what he is thinking of her conduct, and enters into the rose question freely, and tells him of the exquisite roses the Rector can have all the year round; of the amusing things people say as to his manner of cultivating them and protecting them in tempestuous weather; of his conservatory and hot-houses for them; and of the rose show that is to be in the coming summer, in which she is to be one of the competitors, and of some lovely roses she has coming into bloom just now, under glass, of course, the settings for which the Rector had given her.

The Rector, in his enthusiasm, had for pupils in the art everybody he could persuade to begin it. He supplied them with rose settings, and constantly visited the said rose trees to see how they were progressing,

and gave all sorts of instructions as to their treatment in his absence. So Grace, with the assistance of her brother-in-law, was one of his most successful pupils. Presently she was persuaded to play music, which she had been practising up, and teaching Mr. Morton, who had a sonorous bass, which if it lacked in culture it made up for in power, which is still something. Noël, too, joined in some quartets from the "Messiah," and "Elijah," and "Creation," and other sacred music.

Time passed all too soon. Mr. Morton visited the stables to report the well-being of The Ladybird, and a light supper tray, candles, and good-nights brought to a close the most curious evening Noël Chester had ever spent. It was long before he could close his eyes. The image of Grace rose up before him; he repeated over and over again every word he had said to her and every word she had said to him; turned over and over every trifle that had passed, and was in such an excited state that only the booming stroke of the hall-clock warned him that if he meant to sleep at all, it was high time to begin.

Grace, too, was no less excited; she certainly lost for that night her beauty-sleep over the handsome stranger, and in her dreams he played the part of Prince-Charming, and played more antics than did ever knight or hero of old in the days of the Barmecides.

Watson, too, slept the sleep of peace on his "shake-down" in the harness-room, without fear or tremor of ghost or goblin. The whole household reposed in the

"Sleep and oblivion that reigns over all."

And the snow fell faster and faster still; flake upon




flake piled it up higher and higher, great snow-wreaths covering up all unsightly places, and for once in time decking out old mother earth in handsomer robes than ever Worth designed, in lovelier jewels than ever Golconda produced, and yet the poor old dame must needs go to sleep in all her finery, and slept as quietly, too, as if she had been in her Cinderella rags and ashes. *Mais ne longtemps pas, mon ami, ne longtemps pas.*

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## CHAPTER VI.

CHRISTMAS MORNING.—AN EXCEPTION WHICH PROVES THE RULE  
OF “HE THAT GOES A-BORROWING.”—CHRISTMAS DAY  
WITH THE KERSTONE FAMILY.

HRISTMAS morning, fair and bright; the fiery rays of the sun sparkling over the snow-clad hills and vales, lacking the power to melt a single particle, and for once being dethroned by King Frost, whose freezing breath hangs like a grey mist upon the horizon away nor'-westward, holding the kingdom which he has won for a space in his icy enthrallment—a beautiful bondage, a lovely slavery—and, while he reigns, a fair kingdom. Out upon the stillness bursts the sweet chiming of Christmas bells—melodious, solemn, like a benediction—bearing on its wings, as pure flowers, the tender message of joy, and peace, and good will: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

Upon the expanse of snow are a multitude of birds, devouring the seeds Watson has flung for them. Three glossy, brisk, business-like blackbirds (*Thurdas merula*), with their orange bills and feet, and one little female bird in her modest garb of brown, seemingly leaving all the pride of colour to her lord, who is too busy at his Christmas morning meal to think ought of it just now; half-a-dozen tiny redbreasts (*Erythæa*), a speck of bright



colour upon the snow, with their round, bright eyes sparkling as if only a little more breakfast would tempt them to burst into song; a whole crowd of ragged, chattering, ubiquitous sparrows, both house (*Passer Domesticus*) and hedge (*Accentor*), who, upon the slightest scare, rush away with a flutter and whir, and return again immediately to their treasure left behind, and over which they spread themselves, as if, greedily, to take in as much for themselves and leave as little to their neighbours as ever they can; a pair of wicked, little blue beauties, tomtits (*Parvus cœrulens*), squabble and peck viciously at each other, as if they had any business there at all, when they ought to be at least casting an eye upon the new additions from the stables upon the manure heap, or sharing collie's meat bone by his kennel door, or hunting dry walls and secret places for a chrysalis, and pick it from its cocoon instead of trying to peck each other's pretty little eyes out, or plucking out their blue feathers for no earthly reason whatever, forgetting, like some of our wicked selves, that fighting, and squabbling, and pecking spoils all beauty, both human and ornithic, and makes it a greater shame that beauty of person should be marred by an unlovely nature; forgetting, too, as mankind do, the message of peace and goodwill, and even their very breakfast. But soon they make it up, and fall upon a bone left for the dogs, and suffice themselves upon it, and take their exercise in a thousand-and-one attitudes—upon the walls and upon the trees, hanging back downwards from a twig, and, indeed, every conceivable way, except standing upright upon their little legs, as rational birds should, and are such dear little creatures that one

cannot help loving them, even although they are a bit quarrelsome, and like to prove which is best man and biggest fellow.

The bells ring out a joyous strain; the birds rise up in fright at the frolics of The Ladybird, as Watson brings her round to the door in readiness for her master, curveting and prancing, fresh and bright, her glossy coat shining in the sun, her fine eyes flashing, and two streams of breath from her nostrils rushing out upon the frosty air, like miniature steam-engines.

Upon the door-step they all stand to speed the parting guest. Mrs. Morton steps forward to give the horse a biscuit she has found in her apron pocket (little Georgie's storing place), and Mr. Morton comes forward to pat her neck, while Watson holds the bridle.

Within the shadow of the doorway Grace stands; and, now that the parting moment comes, Noël feels a wild kind of desire to say something to her, but everything flies through his brain in crazed, excited, chaotic flight. He wants to say something, but looking over his shoulder, with rapid glance, he fancies that others are so near, when he had thought them at least yards away, and what he wants to say is for her ear alone. He does not want to let them all hear what he wants to tell her so much. He turns his back upon them to shield off prying eyes, and grasps her hand, and only whispers hurriedly: "Give me a flower."

Grace, confusedly, takes a knot of Roman hyacinths from her brooch, and tries to unfasten one, but, in her excitement, they won't separate. He reaches out his hand and takes the whole bunch, and slips them into his pocket. For a moment he holds her hands, and



looks into her eyes. Mr. Morton's voice falls on their ears like a cold douche, although it is no louder than it was before, but their strained ears think that he is just at hand. Noël drops her hands, and is gone.

“What ! gone without a word !

Ay, so true love should do, it cannot speak,  
For truth hath better deeds than words wherewith  
to grace it.”

Grace hears as in a dream his voice thanking Mr. and Mrs. Morton for their kindness—hears Mr. Morton assuring him of his belief that the roads are passable, as most people will have them a little cleared for themselves ; that there may be a heavy bit here and there, but his horse is fresh, and in daylight there cannot possibly be any danger—watches him as he bids them good-bye, and takes the bridle rein from Watson, in whose palm he leaves a golden token of thanks for his attentions to The Ladybird ; watches him spring into his saddle, and wish them many happy returns of the season, and, with a hasty glance back towards the door, ride gaily away.

If she could have read his thoughts she would have seen they were all of her ; and when he had turned a bend in the drive he took from his pocket the bunch of white flowers which had so lately been hers, and while he fastened them in his coat whistled three bars of an operatic air all about love and queens, and living and dying, and fighting, and what not, all for the sake of the said queens, and an amazing amount of sentiment—all of which one would have thought Noël, incapable of twenty-four

hours previously. One does not associate spruce, well-dressed, trim, spic-and-span neatness with a love-lorn loon, not to speak of lucid, clear-headed, sound reasoning that is at a certain stage of the disease. There is not a doubt but there comes in a prodigious deal of reasoning, and dressing, and dandifying by-and-by, but it all shapes itself in one groove to gain the admiration and approbation of the fair who has cast their spell and caught you in their toils before one can say Tom Tiddle or solve the riddle; and much dandyism and loquaciousness are only a means to an end—an end, by the way, that all your neighbours, your friends, foes, and relations laugh at, chafe at, mock at, scoff at, but not a soul of them escapes it. According to their powers of feeling, they are, or have been every one in love; secretly, openly, young or old, under the rose or above the rose, they have been there, and they liked it, too, although they may call *you* a fool, a gossoon, a booby, a noodle, a mooning youth, a greenhorn, and all such pretty epithets to infinity. But don't let it stop you, *mon ami*; it did not stop Noël Chester. But, of course, he waited till he was round a corner, and then he whistled so briskly, and was so gay, and happy, and merry, that a squad of sparrows stood to stare after him, and a robin on a bough, who was chiming a little tune, stopped to catch the refrain as The Ladybird swept past; and it was all the old tune, which redbreast knew well enough—love for ever, and for aye.

To Grace all things seem of gold and rose, sunshine and gladness; and when she puts on her furs, tucks her hands inside her muff, as cosy as a wren's nest, and threads her way to Church amongst the little paths that



folks have cut in the great snowdrifts, and banked the snow upon either side, so that she can only see straight before her, if she wanted to see—but she does not. She only sees Noël's eyes, and feels the clasp of his hands, and does not see Georgie at all, when he stands up in Church to have a peep at his neighbours and see what they are all doing, or hear him as he counts the buttons on his coat first up and then down, and then upon the pockets, and then upon the cuffs, in a loud whisper as if he were telling himself stories to put himself off to sleep; and she only begins to realize what he is at, when he goes down on his knees and begins to count the buttons on her coat, beginning at the last one, and wanting to go up to her chin. It takes much coaxing to beguile the refractory Georgie into good behaviour, and he presently sits and stares up at the Rector, until his big eyes begin to bob, and, wakes up with a start at the peal of the organ, and chants his hymns in a piping voice that knows nothing as yet of boyish bashfulness, and tells his auntie that it is nice to walk home from Church on a little path, like ducks going home, and asks her won't she come every day; and is astonished when she abstractedly says yes. "*Every day*, auntie," he cries. Every day is just a little more than Georgie bargained for. Being a good boy was not Georgie's forte, but being a lovable one was. He had just the spice of wilfulness that takes away insipidity from mere goodness, and made him the darling of the household, and ran him into extreme danger of being a "spoiled stick," as his papa frequently called him.

Christmas-day is holiday time for the servants at the Cross-roads farm; and Mrs. Morton bestirs herself

within doors to fill up the deficiency, while Mr. Morton, after the departure of his guest, proceeds with Watson (who is not gone yet) to the region of his flocks and herds; and on the way meets with a neighbour coming to see him, and wishes him a hearty good morrow and merry Christmas; but all the while seeing something is wrong. William Kerstone, he well remembers, was once one of the most pleasant, jolly, and prosperous of men, and one of the largest farmers in the neighbourhood, but of late things seemed to have gone wrong with him. His lease had dropped out, and his rent mercilessly raised by an iron and stony-hearted landlord. He had to use his private capital for that and other etceteras, which he could not make the farm pay. As far as flax went, his land seemed to be cropped out; and the fine talk of the times about higher classed farming only brought a bitter smile to his lip, for in it he saw only a demand for more money, more money, more money; running their necks into the yoke of a Government loan to enable them to pay their landlord's rents and outrageous taxes, as if plunging a man into debt up to his eyes, ever yet helped him out of the misery of poverty; and more especially when the said loan falls into the hands of knaves who sell it and make gain, and the repayment falls to the lot of his neighbour, who is happy enough to have a certain number of acres of land, therefore *his* nose is put to the grindstone and repayment is ground out of him upon the downy paths (of payment made easy), the flower-strewn way of taxation.

The increasing bad times weighed heavily upon William Kerstone. An investment in which his father had placed a good deal of his money and in which he



had great faith, had gone down so miserably low, owing to the Australian crashes, that hope was well-nigh deserting him, and his struggles were wearing him into his grave, when he ought to have been in the prime of his manhood. They were, in truth, fast breaking his spirit, and now something—the finishing stroke, the last straw—had been added to all these, and a look of despair was in his weary eyes, the lines of care showed up more plainly, and the grey locks above his temples were more conspicuous.

Mr. Morton talked cheerfully for a minute or two, telling him of the stranger's visit, and of the fine horse he had; and, guessing at the cause of the added worry in Mr. Kerstone, asked him if he had his young horse ready for the fair (to be in a couple of weeks' time). This brought out the trouble; the horse was not ready, and would not be till May Day, if he ever was ready for any fair, or worth a button in his life again.

This young horse, reared by Mr. Kerstone, and now ready for sale, had been such a fine animal that he would have commanded a high price, and upon him he was depending for the greater part of his rent. Truth to tell, he had no other means of finding it; and, if the horse failed, which way to turn he did not know. So now this, the centre of all his hopes, had the preceding evening slipped his shoulder when out exercising, and was now useless for at least six months, if ever it would be worth a five-pound note in his life again. Truly, the poor man's frail reed had snapped beneath him, and left him stranded. Not a member of his family had slept that night, pondering what next they should do, where next they should turn. They had held a con-

clave all this fair Christmas morning, discussing a proposal, looking at it from every point of view, from every vantage ground, trying to dip into the future further than human eyes can see. They planned, arranged, and re-arranged all, with one proviso, the pivot upon which the world turns—Gold. If they could get the money to help them to carry out this new scheme, they would try a new land, a new hemisphere, and see if they could not induce Fortune to smile upon them again, or see if she had resolved never more to favour them; to see if a new country could not do what all their efforts had utterly failed to do in the old, and, with one clean sweep, take the advice of the ancient poet, when he advises—

“ Suppress the botch-work without more ado,  
And on the anvil beat it out anew.”

They had patched up their fortunes long enough; they would now seek a new one in a new field. California was the land of their hopes. The father and two sons, twin boys of twenty, handsome, clever lads, would go out first, leaving the mother and two daughters at home in charge of everything, until they should see if they prospered sufficiently to bring them out, too, and also a more suitable time for the sale of their effects should arrive.

This was the tale Mr. Kerstone now told in a hesitating, nervous, embarrassed manner. His errand was to ask Mr. Morton if he could lend them the needful money to try this.

Mr. Kerstone kicked a ball of snow he had been rolling with his foot, and exclaimed: “To think, Morton,



I should ever have to come to you with such a tale and such a request. I feel like a mongrel instead of a man, but if you are able and willing to do this for us, we have vowed—the lads and myself—that, if we live, you shall be paid every fraction, and with a good interest, too. We are bound to make something, and what we do make won't go in rent. I don't know how to leave Mary and the girls behind, but things have come to a pass, and many a thing men have to do they wot not of."

If Mr. Morton had been a hard man, which he certainly was not, although he was a wise, sensible man, the look in his neighbour's face would have moved him to pity. He pondered for a moment with a straw between his lips, then, placing his hand upon the elder man's shoulder, he said: "I will do what I can, Kerstone. If you had asked me for the loan of the rent now, I doubt me if I should have given it. No man can ever pay what he borrows for rent, and the old demand always comes back; but, as I believe you have a good chance where you are going, and the wisest thing you can do, and better for the boys than staying at home, and I know you will pay me, for I can't do without it myself, in a couple of weeks or so I can give you what will do—perhaps what you want. Let me see now," he continued; "there is some coming from the London and Westminster Bank the first Monday after the third Wednesday in January, early this year, as the month begins on Wednesday. If you can be ready about that time, I think the money won't fail you, and I wish ye good luck, man," he ended up, a little flustered, for Mr. Kerstone wrung his hand, and

muttered, "God bless you, Morton, and reward you for this," and betook himself, with a gladdened heart, home to his anxious family.

The Kerstone family were waiting for the return of their father from his mission with mixed feelings and what patience they could muster. The boys wished he might succeed, for with the impatience of the charger when he scents the battle afar off, they champed the bit, fretted at the curb, and pawed the earth with impatient feet. They wished to go forth into the battle of life—to get their wings singed, their fingers burned, their wits sharpened, "For home-bred youth hath ever homely wit," and their kindly, boyish, impulsive natures metamorphosed into unfeeling iron and granite with friction against their fellow-man, all because of a very natural desire to see and know a little of the world.

The girls were in a state of agitation bordering upon fright. They were swayed from side to side, not knowing whether to be glad with the boys or sorry with their mother, so they did both; wept and laughed, sighed and smiled, too young to make up their own minds as to what they wished, or should like; their gentle hearts swayed with whatever tender emotion was nearest. They fulfilled to perfection the injunction, "Weep with them that weep, and rejoice with them that rejoice;" one minute dancing with delight at the scenes called up before them by the boys, the next with a wistful look into their mother's face, knowing that she grieved, or a coaxing arm round her neck, or a little squeeze of her arm, and at last shaking their curly heads at their brothers in affected defiance, and carelessness of the nice things they were saying. They helped



their mother with her preparations for dinner, and showed their sympathy by implicit obedience. Little Poppet, who at other times would stop to reason with a sage, and prove why certain things ought to be done in an entirely different way from what she was wanted to do it, never opened her pursed-up rosy lips once in objections, but screwed up her eyes wickedly at the boys, and shook her head repeatedly at them, and was as good as it is possible for a little girl to be, stopping short of a real angel.

But poor Mrs. Kerstone's heart was heavy; her husband and she were both of the sort who love the old homestead, love the very earth—soil and sod, stick and stone, hole and corner, of their father's; and it was with heavy heart she contemplated the proposed change.

The boys were busily engaged at occupations congenial to them. Ambrose, eldest of the twins, was looking closely at a gun, every fitting shining brightly from the cleaning it had received at his hands. On the table by him were powder and shot, pouches, bits of rag, caps, oil cans, and every possible, but indescribable thing he deemed necessary for the carrying out of his operations. He was a boy (he considered himself a full-grown man, and never suffered anybody but his mother to call him a boy—and indeed she very frequently called them children, giving one the impression that they were about seven or eight—and she had never yet got quite over the habit of prefixing as an endearing term the adjective “wee,” although they both stood six feet in their stockings), who had a natural gift for engineering, and designing machinery of every description. All things of wheels, springs, screws, bolts, metal,

and wood were things of beauty in his eyes and objects of closest inspection, and upon all the house-tops swung and creaked, and whirled in the wind as many different weather-cocks as his ingenious mind could invent, or pick up, and his dexterous fingers fashion. A trout and cockerel vied with each other which should tell truest which way the wind blew; a mill-wheel spun round; a soldier presented arms, and must have led a very laborious life and suffered much hardships up there in the rain and wind, hail and storm. And Ambrose had no mercy, for if he but once failed to shoulder his gun, down he came, and after much knocking, and nailing, and screwing was set up again to the self-same task, presenting arms, right-about face, left, halt! The sun blistered him, the frost froze him, the collie speckled him, the rain washed all off again, the wind dried him up, and he began the round over and over again, burning, freezing, sooty, washing, drying, till in very weariness of spirit he groaned and creaked; and Ambrose's eye was cocked warningly up at him with threats of greese and nails in the very flicker of his lids: so the poor old chap went on upon his toilsome way perforce, not from desire, but because he must, just as if he were in the flesh, under the law, with the enemy in front, and a court-martial behind.

When Ambrose and Geoffrey were about ten years old, they disappeared every evening after they had come from school and had dinner, and were lost for hours, and only came in about dusk, sloppy and muddy, and stood so near the fire to dry themselves in a hurry before their mother should see them, and emitted clouds of steam from their saturated clothes, that if they had lived in the



days of Queen Bess, instead of in the days of Queen Victoria, they might have been supposed to be on fire and requiring a douse, as Sir Walter was supposed to do, only it was not tobacco made them smoke—they had not quite attained to such dignity as that just yet. But plotting, secrecy, mystery, success, breathed in every action, sat upon their rosy cheeks, and sparkled in their eyes. Their mother dried and brushed their garments, declaring all the while that boys will be boys, and contrasting them with little girls and their tidy habits, making tea in their dolly houses, not slopping themselves nor wearing out their clothes, nor causing worry and vexation of all kinds, but being all the while trained up in the way they should go, being ground in the faith of all good mothers and fathers, and indeed brothers too, that one man, however indifferent he may turn out to be, is as good as at least seven excellent women, however excellent they may be; training up her little daughters so that when their day came, they might go on training and training throughout successive generations, even though many times the tale is reversed when there is only one good woman to equal many times more than seven men, and when she does it too.

But that matters not at all so long as there are Mrs. Kerstones alive who love both sons and daughters; Mrs. Kerstone loves her daughters as herself, but loves her sons a long way beyond either; finds fault, scolds, pets, spoils, cuddles, all in a breath; all their shortcomings mentioned while she worships at their shrine. Her air to her daughters the while—although she does not put it in words—You, my dears, are like myself, but these, my loves, are MEN. She knows not why she does it, in fact

she is quite unconscious of doing it, but she does it, it is her nature and in nowise her reason, just as it is her nature to be a woman. She is born with it, it is one of her attributes, so she will therefore go on doing it probably as long as there are mothers, and sons, and daughters. And why not? If she stopped dinning it into their ears, the boys might forget, and so might the girls too; the latter might lose a grievance, and (they are like the "Irish," as the British say of us Islanders,) they love a grievance; and as it is the nature of man and beast to squabble, why, they might have a worse cause of contention, and they might easily have a better, so although it is not the way of the peacemaker, 'tis the way they will go, and the best man or greatest bully wins the day.

At this time she was continually finding the boys steaming by the ingle nook of an evening, when she came from milking, and would exclaim:

"Oh! Geoffrey, you naughty boy, where were you? Ambrose, you should know better than to take your little brother into dirty places, where were you?" They both stoutly declared that they were "nowhere," the usual answer of boys when they are doubtful as to the reception of their real whereabouts.

"Nowhere," said Geoffrey. "Nowhere," said Ambrose.

"Were you in the river?" guessed their mother, looking at their draggled, dejected, hapless condition, offering it as a sort of suggestion that might recall their momentary forgetfulness.

"Only a wee, wee minute," said Ambrose, partially recovering his memory, not admitting to himself even



that he had been there four whole hours, and trying to make it look very small in his mother's eyes—a trifle not worth her notice lest she should altogether prohibit it.

“Well,” she said, “get those wet things off quickly,” and while she helped Geoffrey, he peeped into her pocket that was swelling with fulness, dived in his hand, and brought out an apple that was there on purpose, with rosy cheeks, no rosier than his own. Ambrose peeped, and there was another out of which he took huge bites between his efforts to get his long stockings off his wet legs, and he observed at each gap how the red tinge left rainbow streaks in the pulp, and how the juice gushed from the pores, and how he had to hurry and eat it, leaving one stocking hanging from his foot wrong side out while he did it; and when their mother said in mild remonstrance, trying by wiles to win a promise, “You won’t go again, like good boys.”

Ambrose said, “Augh—no—ma,” each pause bearing the significance, as his mother knew, that he wanted to go, but only for a “wee, wee minute;” while he wanted to please her by promising, yet he wanted to leave himself a small margin, a little loop-hole of escape, and not be altogether violating his promise if he found himself drawn riverwards against his better judgment.

Ambrose was always responsible, being the eldest by thirty minutes—the leader in all things. Geoffrey was his follower and ally, doing just as he did, saying just as he said, yielding a younger brother's obedience to all his commands—never hesitating or questioning his authority; in appearance, scarcely to be distinguished one from the other, every feature and limb seemed to

be cast in the same mould, the only difference being, Ambrose always stepped half a foot in front, as if in protection of his younger brother, and with the air of "Talk to me, sir, if you please; settle with me first; Geoffrey is only a little fellow; I can stand the hardest blows; you'll fight me before you come to Geoffrey; I'm here to take care of Geoffrey," a challenge bristling in every fair hair and gleaming in his fearless blue eyes.

Mr. Kerstone came upon the cause of their water expedition one afternoon quite unexpectedly. Hearing an unusual rushing noise, he went to see what it could be—rather in idle curiosity, indeed—not expecting anything. At a corner where two thorn fences met, and where the water ran rapidly down the hillside and from the shores, forming a deep basin of water at the foot, escaping from thence into the river that glided smoothly by, was the cause of all the rushing, spluttering noise, and Mr. Kerstone stood upon the bank, gazing down at it with surprise and pleasure. A beautiful little mill (the handiwork of the boys), of most complex design, in perfect working order, turned by water, churned and splashed fussily, as if it were supplying work for thousands of hands, instead of the two muddy little water-elves, working to keep it in order. At the back, where the water fell, was the reservoir, banked up with mud, stones, and turf, with a small sluice, raised enough to permit a narrow ribbon-like flow of water to fall in all its strength upon a wooden wheel, about a foot in diameter. This, connected by a band, turned another wheel, prettier in design and much larger, which was for ornament, and



over which the water sparkled and tossed, falling in white foam and feathery spray; and a smaller wheel, also connected with the first, was attached skilfully to a piece of wood, which formed the staff of a little churn, which splashed up and down merrily, and as regular as clock-work, and which, if it had been in their mother's dairy would have brought butter in the shortest possible time.

Ambrose was crouching down clapping the muddy bank of the reservoir with his hands, thrusting in bits of wood, turf, and stones where the water was threatening to burst through. Geoffrey was bending over him, handing them to him as he needed them, holding under his arm, and having his pockets stuffed with materials which he had been collecting for those repairs, chatting in very big language as befitted the occasion, and addressing him as Man Ambrose.

They were so busy and so engrossed that they neither saw nor heard their father until his voice startled them, so that they nearly tumbled into the water. Geoffrey was delighted that his father should see it working so splendidly, for their labours had been great and long before their success had been achieved, but Ambrose, wisely, proudly, solemnly, and with all the dignity due to his position, as if he were the manager of a great public factory, cast a criticising eye upon it, and remarked to his father, as if he were cognizant of its progress all the while, and had now come to see it in full working order: "She is going fine; ain't she, father?" and proceeded to explain all its workings in the most scientific language at his command; Geoffrey all the while prancing about excitedly, until Ambrose

told him he had best get out or he would run his foot through the reservoir—which Geoffrey did, Ambrose following. They stood upon the bank, one on each side of their father, thrusting a small, wet, cold hand into his, and looking at the wheels flying, and the water sparkling, and dashing, and foaming, sinking into bubbles, and melting away, as they mingled with the smooth, broad expanse of the swimming river beyond.

Two dirty, wet, slopped, but perfectly happy, little creatures they were, in all the pride of success, and their father's approval, who stood with a smile upon his lips as he looked, and then he said: "Let us go home now, my boys, to tea, and tell mother, and bring her to see it afterwards."

"Yes, yes," they both cried, "and bring Cissie and Poppet to see it too;" and they danced with delight, as they talked of their mother's surprise when she should see it, and swung their discarded boots and stockings round their heads, forgetting in the pleasure of the moment that one had lost a garter and another a stocking, but what of that when such a mill had been brought to perfection—the work of many "wee, wee minutes" accomplished, and the end success.

But Ambrose and Geoffrey had grown into young giants since then—handsome, tall, broad-shouldered, large-limbed, fair-haired, ruddy-complexioned, blue-eyed lads of twenty, as much alike as when they were children, and with all the old characteristics strongly developed—the same traits more clearly defined.

Ambrose rubbed away at his gun, primed and loaded it, handling it daintily and carefully. Geoffrey also stood by the same table, screwing brass-fittings



into a wicker bird-cage Ambrose had made for Grace Wardwood, and which Geoffrey offered to finish, having nothing better on hands while they waited for the return of their father.

Mrs. Kerstone peeped into the oven at the quickly-browning fowl, gave the Yorkshire pudding a turn, put in a pile of plates upon the top-shelf to heat, gently closed the door, with a quivering sigh, went over to the boys, and stood watching them with heavy heart. Turkeys were not so plentiful as they used to be with Mrs. Kerstone, although she reared quite as large flocks—larger, indeed—but she was very glad to sell them now instead of using them, and made very welcome the money they brought, saving it up carefully for some time, wiping out the worry in her husband's face when she brought out her store. She was a thoroughly thrifty, good housewife, but it is little women can do at money-making in such a position, excepting keeping down household expenses, scraping to make ends meet on the merest nothing, rearing fowls, saving up the small prices that butter, eggs, milk, chickens, cheese, fruit, bring away in the heart of a country twenty or thirty miles from large cities, where everybody is struggling at the same things, with no better means of disposing of them.

Of late years Mr. Kerstone's cows had been growing fewer and fewer; gardening had to be neglected for more heavy farm work, and feeding for fowls grew more limited. Many a sigh came from the lips and tears from the eyes of Mary Kerstone as she watched the anxiety and worry grow in her husband's face, and the hope and courage die out day by day;

one thing after another stopping short of doing what was expected of it, little by little dwindling away into nothingness, the struggle wearing William Kerstone into an old man in his prime; no hope of anything better for the boys, brought up to boorish labour only, with such a talent—genius in truth—as Ambrose possessed; no education, no training, or opening as other men's sons had, wasting a gift upon rakes, and ploughs, and harrows, which, with a University education, would lift him out of the mire of physical labour for ever. It is no wonder that her heart was wrung with a sense of helplessness; and it was only the courage that such women possess that enabled her to meet her husband with a smiling face and words of hope and encouragement when he, too, was likely to break down under the impossible burdens laid upon him; lift up with loving tenderness a little corner of the sombre cloud that hung over them, showing him a glimpse of a silver lining beyond. But even she could not now turn up a corner of the cloud. She needed in her turn someone to whisper hope in her ear, and her husband had determined that not only should she see a silver lining, but a golden one—a very Canaan, flowing with milk and honey—and that it should be his hand that would bring her the reality of what she had so often tried to give him a glimpse.

The last straw had been laid upon his back, not breaking it, but spurring him on to greater action, giving him the courage which until now he lacked—enough courage to leave his native land—the home of his fathers for many generations; the green sod upon which he had been born and bred, and to which men



will cling with surprising tenacity and curious fondness long after it has failed them, and upon which they have had little but hardship, and toil, and penury in the truest sense of the words; but there also whatever moments of joy has been theirs, whatever little happinesses, or loves, or pleasures they have known, there they twine like tendrils round their hearts and their home, binding them together with links which they find hard to sunder, cruel to part—as cruel as the rude wrenching up of a young tree, tearing, and breaking, and snapping every root, so that not one living fibre is left to take root in new soil. But William Kerstone had given the wrench in hopes that there would still be roots left in plenty for transplantation; but with Mrs. Kerstone it was too sudden, too new, too fresh at the last for her to salve over all at once, and a tear would trickle down unbidden, and fall upon the table amongst the tools and implements with which the boys worked, and both of them tried to whisper bright words into her ear—Ambrose with a tender kiss and Geoffrey with a coaxing, persuasive squeeze of his arm; and she would smile at them, and go off and peep into saucepans, with pretended anxiety about dinner, and another tear would splash upon her hands. Then she would go to where the two girls peeled the potatoes—Cissy in a pre-occupied manner, Poppet in a quick, jerky manner—a manner that had gained for her her name as a child, her movements were so unexpectedly rapid and impulsive. She would pop in a potato into the masher her mother wielded, give her a hug, and take to her potatoes again all in a flash, by way of consoling her; and the mother felt consoled, and kissed her, and sent her to whisk up

the mashed potatoes, to which she added a little cream and batter, and Poppet whisked with a will and vigour she knew her mother approved, and soon had a pile as frothy and white as a whipped egg.

"Now, mother mine, that's what you like, is it not?" she exclaimed, as she heaped them up on a heated dish, laying on the last spoonful lightly, to finish the pyramid. But her mother answered not, for her husband's figure stood in the doorway, and with a little cry she held out her hands towards him, and as he came to her she saw hope and buoyancy in his step and in his eye, and a smile upon his lip, and yet, when he took her hands in his, she wept upon his breast great sobs, as if her heart would break; and he said nought, but smoothed her hair with one hand, and pressed her closer with the other, and when she began to grow calmer, he said, with a tremor in his voice, but with a great attempt at cheerfulness, "It's not so bad after all, Mary, not so bad at all, my dear; it's good news, Mary. Morton is a good fellow, and is going to do the business for us;" and he smoothed her hair very fast, and held her to him very tight. But Mrs. Kerstone suddenly looked up into his face and smiled, and wiped her eyes with her apron, and tried to look pleased; and when he asked, "Have you any dinner, my dear? I feel as if I could eat some," his tone was very brisk. "And I believe there is a smell of Christmas Day coming from the oven, after all. Now, little woman, let us have it." And the little woman let them have it in next to no time.

If it was simple it was neatly and well cooked, and a better one than they had had for many a day, and



the thanks that William Kerstone offered up to his Heavenly Father was from a full heart, humbled and grateful for the mercies spared to them, and the way opened up to him and his family, that they might make a new beginning and have a brighter prospect for the future.

Mrs. Kerstone's face was buried in her apron when he had done. The boys felt that there was a very uncomfortable lump in their throats. Cissie and Poppet's eyes brimmed over, not that they exactly realised all it was to their father and mother, but their little hearts were tender, and melted at sight of their distress.

But Mr. Kerstone resolutely carved up the fowl; the boys cleared their throats, and furtively dispersed a tear with their finger-tips, pretending it was not there, and one after another ventured a remark, and by the time the pudding came round even Mrs. Kerstone could eat a little bit, or, at least, have a plate before her with a little upon it, and was pleased at her husband's praise of her cooking, although she had heard it well-nigh every day of her married life, and when the boys ventured to begin to talk of preparations and plans, they were not checked. The little girls soon grew animated, and joined in vivaciously, and an appeal being made to mother, she, too, joined in.

Very soon the chatter flowed and became excited—chatter, chatter, chatter—talk, talk, talk—ideas, propositions, and proposals scouted and received, everyone saying as much and exactly what they liked, till they grew weary, and the hour for retiring came and found them still at it.

It had gone on all the afternoon—through tea, through the whole evening—chattering and talking away the whole of Christmas Day. It passed away, and they heeded not—passed away for ever! The old year waxed older and older—time-worn, weary and weak—waxed and waned and died. It, too, passed away forever—forever! Nought can ever recall it—nothing bring it back, but in its stead was born a New Year full of hope and promise, full of expectations and ambitions and desires—ambitions and desires to be nobler, wiser, purer. Ambitions, if noble, who can scorn? Desires, if pure, who can deride? And on its wings bright visions of happiness—true happiness—that cometh from above, the fount from which all good things flow.

But, *trahit sua quemque voluptas* (everyone is drawn by his own inclination), and that we know, to our misfortune, alas! is neither noble nor pure sometimes. But *omnia bona bonis* (all things are good with good men), so if our desires and ambitions be not of the fairest forms and purest tints, let us see that we set about righting them without loss of time, for it is in our own hands, and if we fail 'tis our own fault, for we would not heed the voice which says, *Nosce te ipsum* (know thyself), but all the while be studying our neighbours. *Il est vrai, et n'est il pas fâcheux.*

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## CHAPTER VII.

PROPOSALS AND PARTINGS.—WHAT GRACE HEARD ALL ABOUT.—

FREDA CONINGSBY AND HER "FAERIE QUEENE."—

A RENCONTRE.—A RACE.—A PROMISE.

N a morning towards the end of the second week in January the sun shone brilliantly, thawing the icicles that hung from every eave and spouting, causing prismatic hues to flash from every spike, great or little, as the crystal globes drop, drop, drop, to the ground—a pleasant, dripping sound to the ear, although not, perhaps, very pleasant to the pedestrian. But it is a morning that imbues every living thing with fresh vigour, and Grace Wardwood sings a little song as she arranges some scarlet Virginia creeper sprays and variegated ivy leaves in the vases, and amongst them Christmas roses, that have a tinge of pink upon their waxen petals, bespeaking the cruelty of the pinch King Frost gave them when he kissed their pale cheeks. But she pauses for a moment from her singing whilst she thrusts in refractory sprays. Her flowers are ungraceful and require much skill in arrangement, and a look of earnestness rests upon her lip and brow, which presently gives place to one of criticism, joined with a little bend of the head to one side—an indispensable gesture when a clear view or true criticism is to be obtained.

The door lies wide open; so also the hall door, letting in the sweet morning air and freshness. Upon the mat stands a large collie, with planted feet, blinking, watchful eyes, and waving, bushy tail; now and then he gives a low whine, or only the beginning of one, which expresses anxiety more than anything else, and which makes him plant his feet even more firmly than before, as if to render assistance to some object upon which his eyes are fixed intensely.

Further up the staircase is the object of his regard—the baby, May, of the wicker cradle of Christmas Eve, her yellow, golden hair tumbled into her eyes, one shoe off and grasped in one fist, the other grasping tightly the railing of the stairs, by which means she endeavours with flushed cheeks and some vexation to drag herself up the shallow steps upon an exploring expedition, and upon the way meets with difficulties, as does every other explorer whatsoever.

Hitherto her hands have been used indiscriminately as hands and paws, and show signs of being so used in the way of plenty of mud, and which, in her perplexity and breathless condition, she transfers to her eyes, as she attempts to thrust aside the ends of the little curls, which just reach into them, thereby rendering her blind, and causing her to be unable to proceed on her way. Upon the lowest step is a cup of loblollie she deserted when the fancy for ascending higher took possession of her little brain. An eyeless dolly, with a broken nose and ragged garments, lies prone upon the mat near Bounce's paws, awaiting her return.

But in a worse strait than all of them was Prince, the fox terrier, who has constituted himself chief



guardian of this very fanciful and wilful little lady. If he cannot stop her climbing propensities, and if she will fall, then it will be over his body, for upon the very edge of the step, between her and danger, he is planted as if he were petrified with fear of that calamity; and no matter how much she pushes at him to get him out of the way, or grasps handfuls of his wrinkled skin, or strikes out with her little red shoe, Prince knows better than to yield to her, and remains immovable at his post, knowing better than she what is for her good, whining anxiously below his breath all the time.

“‘Way, naughty Prince,” she cries; “bad, wicked, naughty dog. Baby beat ‘oo. Do ‘way,” and she shoves and pushes at him.

Bounce barks once or twice,—short, sharp barks—not fully expressed, and tramples upon the doll, ready to catch her if she comes; but Prince is motionless—yeoman of the guard to his little queen and mistress.

Grace, attracted by Bounce’s barks, comes out to see what is up, and finds a little red shoe coming swiftly through the railing of the stairs; sees baby May, one foot slipped over the edge of the step, lying on her elbow, having lost her balance, and just about to give a loud whine for assistance, more capable than either the dogs or the doll can give, and when she is picked up announces her intentions and desires.

“Baby May wants her new toat and baw, auntie, to do out. Baby May wants to do out to pick violets.” She speaks of herself in the third person, as if she were a personage of importance, whose desires were to be attended to without any opposition.

Grace opens her hands and looks at them, and then at her. The baby looks at them and at her auntie, and says, "Dirty hansh; wash baby's dirty hansh, auntie." And when her auntie asks, "Baby May is a naughty girl, is she not?" she tries a compromise, and says, while she claps her hands together, "Dirty, naughty hansh; bad hansh," rolling the blame off May and putting it upon the irresponsible hands, as older and wiser folks will do occasionally.

Whilst she is being arrayed in her little scarlet coat and bonnet, otherwise her "toat and baw," with ermine collar and muff, which looks like snow upon holly berries, a new idea strikes her, and she calls Rosey, the maid, who is arranging the room, to her assistance imperatively, and tells her to "Hurry, Rory, and put on my shoes like roory, 'till I get out to see the young turks."

The young turks, which sounds formidable, was a flock of very early chickens, she suddenly recollected, and, as she called all such birds turkeys, it is plain that fighting was not the cause of her desire to hurry like fury, but only the pleasure of seeing the little downy dots popping about so funnily as they picked up food about their mother's feet, or pushed their heads through her feathers to blink their little round eyes at May, as she stood curiously gazing at them.

When she is dressed, pleasure and pride beam from her countenance, and she chats volubly as they saunter forth into the sunshine, the dogs scampering round them, a robin (*Erythaca*) sings a sweet little lay upon a bough, and where the snow has disappeared, snow-drops and golden and purple tipped crocuses peep forth. Grace places May upon a rustic bench while she picks



a few snowdrops and pins them in her collar, and into May's cap. And while they are thus engaged, the crystal drops trickle from the icicles, and the sun shines rainbow hues through them as they fall, forming little rivulets which gather themselves together into the water tables of the drive, and run and sparkle merrily. The little robin pipes, the old scarlet-combed cock claps his wings upon the dust-bin, while he scratches holes in it, and a couple of hens, a dorking and a spanish, help him to scratch and pick up such treasures as they find. And the wind blows freshly, and the sun shines brightly, and the earth spins round, and all the while Grace Wardwood thinks of a certain pair of mischievous, handsome dark eyes, and wonders if their owner has gone away from the Rectory, or if he does not mean to call before he leaves the country; and says that it will be very ungracious of him if he does, but thinks he will be guilty of no such ungracious act, and wonders how soon he will come, how he will look, and what he may say or do, forming a thousand and one conjectures quite possible, but more than certain to prove improbable, and dreaming dreams, building castles, forming visions, painting pictures, hoping hopes, wishing wishes, answering baby May at random, all the while the sun shines, and robin sings, and the earth spins round.

It is with a shock of startled surprise that she hears a voice address her over the thick clipped yew hedge. A momentary feeling of irritation gives place to one of remorse when she discovers it to be Ambrose Kerstone who disturbs her, and who calmly steps over the wire fence at the end of the hedge as if he were Gulliver in the land of Liliput, so easy is his progress,

and so little of a barrier is the wire fence to his long legs. The dogs rush to meet him and jump up upon him. Grace welcomes him warmly with a pleasant smile, and outstretched hand; baby May claps her little palms together and reaches towards him; and when he tosses her up she screams with delight and laughter, and when she is enthroned upon his shoulder, clasps her arms so tightly round his head that she knocks off his cap and almost entirely closes up his eyes with the closeness of her embrace. But Ambrose wriggles his head up and down until he has one eye uncovered, then he looks rather sheepishly at Grace, while the little tyrant up aloft crows and kicks her little red shoes against his breast.

"We are going next week, Grace," he says, "everything is ready now; I wish the time were here."

Grace hardly knows what to say; but with a kindly desire to be cheerful, says: "So soon, then you will be coming back a great millionaire, Ambrose, some day, and looking down on all small fry. You will develop into a 'king' of some sort, so rich, that you can't count your money. You know the Americans are so very rich, some of them."

"Yes," said Ambrose, "and some of them are so very poor, everything in America is so great—either great riches, or great poverty, no moderate folks there, no half-and-between, no middlemen."

"Oh, come sir," cried Grace, wilfully misunderstanding, "middlemen are always wicked and cannot help being rogues. Opportunity makes rogues of more than the middlemen; but resolve that you shall neither be of the very poor nor of the rogues, but be a



millionaire sailing about in carriages drawn by thoroughbreds; eat your dinner of bank-notes, drink melted gold for wine, have diamonds for buttons to your coat, or gold like a waiter, all from your mines; have the seas covered over with your ships, and don't speak to anybody less than dukes."

"All right," said Ambrose, struggling out of May's confining arm that bound his head around like a Mohammedan turban. "I'll be the millionaire if you promise to wait and be the millionairess, Grace."

Ambrose was very greatly in love with Grace, and was there on purpose to ask her to wait for him, for with all the bright hopes of youth he expected to come back very rich in next to no time, to use his own words, and fully believed that all that was needed was to be engaged, and to have his bride ready for the not far distant day when he should be rich enough to come and claim her.

It is rather late you know to look out for a wife when you are ready to marry, because then you see the right one might not be there, and you might not stay long enough in the notion to find her, and might have to be putting up with anything that comes easily to hand, as the old song goes, "For fear that I get none," so it saves a lot of bother to have everything in readiness, waiting for the needful to turn up Micawber-like. Not that Ambrose had any intention of *waiting* for it to turn up; he fully intended to turn it up if strength of muscle, youth, and health and resolution meant anything; but if he did not secure the girl he wanted, why, some other fellow might snap her up, and girls in general might run done before he got one.

"The early bird catches the worm," was a maxim Ambrose had always heard was one to take heed to, being very sage and a good guide to youth, especially indolent youth, although it is never an indolent youth that sets it up for a rule to himself. So Ambrose, being the opposite extreme to indolence, prepares to put things in proper order. He had hinted as much to Grace several times, but had always been put off, and he did not mean to be put off now: so he follows up what he considers a fair beginning.

"You wouldn't wait for a fellow, would you, Grace?" he says, with an air of being guilty of something dreadful and being very sorry about it (a first proposal must be a very trying affair).

Grace looked as if she didn't want to, and was sorry about that, but she said in an expostulatory tone:

"Well, you know, Ambrose, I am a good deal older than you."

"Just six months, Grace," he broke in, "and what is six months? Nothing at all. I know I'm not the sort of fellow you deserve, but if I was beginning to look like a millionaire—six months is nothing, Grace; if you cared for a fellow you wouldn't mention it, it is not worth mentioning."

"Oh! but it is on the wrong side," she said with the air of being his mother at least; and looking at his aggrieved expression, she was sorry to refuse him anything when he was going away, but two dark eyes danced before her memory, and so she remonstrated with Ambrose.

"Well, but, Grace, I'm so much bigger. Anybody would think to look at me I was four or five years older than you."



"Yes, if it went by size," she said demurely.

"Well, I look older anyhow," and he stretched himself as if his inches would maintain it. "Nobody would know if you didn't keep telling it, and if you cared, Grace, you would say Yes, and I should go away the happiest fellow alive, and work like a nigger, all for you, Grace," his voice grew suasive. But the dark eyes danced in a vision before Grace, and the blue ones of Ambrose had no effect.

"Now, Ambrose, you know you won't be married this ten years, at the very least. Why, you are never twenty-one yet," and she pretended to be struck with astonishment. "Then you would not want to marry me. Why, I should be nearly as old as your mother by that time. I would still keep on growing older and older as well as you, and—the fact is, we don't suit, Ambrose," she finished lamely. She knew her reasons were not weighty, but she could not begin to explain to him her visions, and say they were reasons, but she said, "I do like you, Ambrose, and think you a nice, good boy, and when you make your fortune as you are sure to do, once you get started, you will marry a nice girl. She won't be like me, because she will love you dearly, as you will surely love her."

Ambrose had grumbled huffishly, and told her she was mighty wise. If she liked a fellow she would marry him right off. Either she liked him or she didn't, some of the two, and was in a pet for half a minute. But his temper was as serene and happy as a summer's day, and, if a quick cloud came, it as quickly passed away, leaving him as friendly and kindly as before.

He gave May a little hitch-up upon his shoulders, and told Grace that they were to be gone on the following Tuesday, and, perhaps, she would think of what he had been asking her, until he came back.

"You know you don't care for anybody else," he averred; "there is no one half good enough here, excepting, perhaps, the Rector, and he could be your father in reality, if you could be my mother. Besides, he is going to be married to that Mr. Chester's sister, who was here on Christmas Eve," and Ambrose, suddenly turning his face to dodge a blow from May's heels, saw the colour flush up richly into Grace's face, and wondered amazedly what he had said now, or if she was offended. She surely could not be offended about the Rector; he was a good little man, and kind and pleasant, but he certainly was pudgy, and, besides, he was going to be married in May, as he said, to Mr. Chester's sister.

Grace laughed a trifle confusedly, but it reassured Ambrose. It was not the Rector, of course, that caused that momentary glow; it was something much handsomer. It was dark eyes, smiling lips, beautiful, crisp, wavy hair; it was the memory of a little bunch of Roman hyacinths, and a close handclasp—a gallant knight, and a noble horse—a vision upon the air that floated for a second and flashed away, as a bubble upon a stream.

Of course it was not the Rector, although the Rector had a greater hand in her fate than she thought just then, and when Ambrose had restored Miss May to her own two little feet, and taken his departure, Grace heard all about what had happened in her absence.



She had only just disappeared with baby May and the two dogs, when the sound of approaching hoofs began to be heard faintly. They grew louder as they neared. The drive was winding, so that the thud, thud, was to be heard long before the cause of it was seen, and as one listened they heard a heavy thud and a lighter one. Nearer and nearer they came, and round the bend came two horsemen, who swept up to the door before Mrs. Morton's startled eyes.

She opened the drawing-room door and peeped in, but Grace was not there. She called softly, "Georgie," but while she called, she knew Georgie was not there either, having gone out with his father farmwards. The two dogs not being visible, the conclusion must be that baby May was gone also, and Mrs. Morton was quite alone in the house; her two maids, being engaged at the laundry-work of the week, were far away in the wash-house beyond hail, so she just had to make the best of it.

The stout little gentleman dismounting from his huge, heavy horse was the Rector of Mossleigh, Mr. Ford-Barron, and in the other she recognised Mr. Noël Chester.

"Why on earth could not Grace have been in?" said Mrs. Morton to herself, as she hastily ran downstairs to meet them at the door. Mrs. Morton remembered the impression Grace had made upon their Christmas guest, and loving, as every true woman does, a little bit of matchmaking, wished with a will that Grace could have been there to deepen the already made impression. But fate destined it otherwise; and all the while Mr. Ford-Barron expressed his thanks for their attentions.

to his friend, and talked over a dozen trifles—discussed the Kerstone family and their departure—she watched Noël's eyes wander towards the door, and was vexed with everybody when she had to explain that Grace was out walking, her whereabouts unknown.

“Oh, yes,” said the Rector, quite graciously and carelessly, “splendid morning for being out of doors; delightful. The young people should stay out as much as possible in such weather. Are her roses progressing favourably? No blight? No green fly? Safe from the ravages of the recent frost? Ahem!—just so.”

And he was in high good humour, which was more than could be said of Noël, who kept whipping his boot with his riding crop, and wondering why the deuce he had not come at a more propitious time. He had been gently urging the Rector nearly all the week to come, but dared not make it a request, and the Rector had been engaged protecting his roses from snow and frost. Tom Morton would not expect him to come and say, “Thank you,” in such weather, he reasoned. “No hurry, no hurry; no call for fuss; plenty of time,” while his rose-trees could not be left even to the hands of a gardener, as anxious, and as heavily saddled with a foible as his master.

But, then, the Rector was not thirty, and had not seen a pair of violet eyes and two blushing cheeks for the first time, and was not mad—quite mad—to see them again. It is quite true the Rector, sedate as he was, could talk and prose about a certain little lady by the hour, if anybody would listen, but that was Noël's sister, and fellows don't want to talk about their sisters—they like much better to talk about other people's sisters.



Noël had managed to hear a good deal about Grace, because of the roses. The Rector had talked about every one of his pupils in that art, and with only a little manœuvring he had drawn him out and heard all there was to hear about Grace and her family.

It was only that morning he had at last said at breakfast that it would be quite inexcusable if he did not call and pay his respects that very day, and the Rector had agreed, and said, "quite so," and ordered their horses for eleven, and went off to see about a special rose-tree, and had to be told that the horses were ready, and that it was past eleven. Then he had to change his coat from an old velveteen to one of broad-cloth. Then he found he had soiled his cuffs with the handling of garden tools, and had to change those. So that it was with plenty of superfluous steam and energy to let off that The Ladybird and her master danced along beside the sober and moderate pace of old Dobbin and his master.

And now, with so many crosses, was it any wonder our young lover should begin to grow peppery in temper? He would have lingered if there had been the shadow of an excuse, or if the Rector could have been detained, but everything that should be said having been said, without bringing Grace upon the scene, no wishing of his seeming to inspire a like wishing on her part—and, as he supposed, no linking chain between their souls being yet established—why, he could not communicate with her at a distance, as lovers should, so he had to put as pretty a face upon it as he could.

But he felt vicious with disappointment after leaving

a nice message for her, and bidding Mrs. Morton a smiling adieu. Vaulting into his saddle he wickedly fretted The Ladybird's sides with the (to her) unknown spurs. She plunged forward, and was as wickedly brought back upon her haunches.

The Rector looked frightened, for riding such a horse as The Ladybird was a sinful risk of life in his eyes—a tempting of Providence. He never rode anything but old Dobbin, whose favourite pace was little quicker than an ordinary man's walk, and when inspired into a canter—as he was this morning—by the company of The Ladybird, it equalled another horse's record race—a thing to be done once in a lifetime only.

The Rector had another horse once—indeed he was only known to have had two riding horses in his life—the first one dying of old age—he entombed him within his rosarium and over him reared a magnificent rose, by way of marking the last resting-place of a faithful and honoured servant. Dobbin was recommended in his stead, as being not many years younger, and as possessing the only two qualities the Rector ever looked for in a horse—"quiet and steady"—qualities, the Rector was often heard to say, not to be despised in either man or beast.

"My—dear—Noël," he began, "I—er—am afraid that is a very dangerous young beast of yours; indeed I have been thinking for some time that it is not quite safe"—the alarmed expression had not left his face. "You ought, as soon as a horse begins to show temper or viciousness—you ought to get rid of him at once. Impatience and viciousness and uncertainty of temper are qualities that should not be lightly over-



looked. Now, look at Dobbin—he has the easiest temper in the world, and not a single vice—ahem!”

The Rector had a very aristocratic way of clearing his throat upon occasions when he wished to add dignity and impressiveness to his words. A combined vocal and nasal protraction of sound, not at all because of any throat irritation, but simply as an ornate punctuation, and which, his admiring parishioners said, when combined with the soft, suasive little handshake he was in the habit of bestowing upon them, was as good as a sermon in itself, and left no doubt whatever as to the quality of his breeding, or the blueness of his blood.

“No matter what qualities a horse like that may possess, a difficult temper, my dear Noël—ahem!—obliterates them all.”

Noël, with a twinge of remorse, was patting The Ladybird's neck and soothing down the frightened creature, who had no more idea of being vicious than the good Rector himself, and who had a temper like a lamb or a sweet May morning, and who, if she had a neck like a swan's, would have turned round her head to rub her nose affectionately against her wicked master's arm.

Noël felt that he had needed the reproof given to the undeserving Ladybird.

“A difficult temper.” Yes, he had shown a bit of temper, and there was just enough of it remaining to make him wish to give the highly-lauded Dobbin a little touch of his whip to shake him out of his placidity, and his master out of his satisfaction. But a better spirit came to his relief, and he refrained and cried:

“All right, old man, let us have a bit of a canter;” and off went The Ladybird, followed by Dobbin, who

pricked up his ears, and had a faint remembrance of being young once—no matter how many years ago—and thundered along, spurning the mud upon the road with heavy feet that flung it high up in the air, where it alighted upon his surprised and not altogether comfortable master, as he bumped up and down in a most unusual manner, trying, with frantic efforts, to restrain his “quiet and steady” steed, as he strained in the footsteps of the flying Ladybird.

When Grace heard all about it, she could have shed tears of vexation and disappointment. What she had been looking forward to every day since he went away and planning to herself in a thousand different ways, that it should happen when she was absent was too vexatious, but that the cause of her prolonged absence should have been talking nonsense to Ambrose Kerstone was more—it was aggravating; and she gave the sliding bottom of the bird-cage Ambrose had given her an impatient shove into its place, frightening the bird so, that it fluttered against the wicker bars, and only returned to its perch after much coaxing and offers of atonement, in the way of sugar and pieces of apple; and all she could hope for was that he might come again—a hope which Mrs. Morton unconsciously put to flight by telling her he was leaving at the end of the week.

Two days later, little Freda Coningsby, the Rector's half-sister, who was a frequent visitor, and great friends with Grace, rode up upon her little cream pony, with long mane and flowing tail, bringing with her news of the interesting individual. Freda was only fifteen, but romantic to her finger tips, and a great little chatterer



besides : so Noël was the tune she piped all the time she stayed. She looked upon him as a King or Knight of story-book stamp, and every word he said, and every action he did that she could recall she considered worthy of record.

Grace encouraged her and accompanied her to the gate on her departure, listening as she bewailed his departure on the morrow. Freda's grief was not the kind to hide itself. She took Grace into her confidence—if it could be called such—in a jolly, light-hearted, hoidenish manner, and grew so exuberant in her praises of him that by the time they reached the gate she declared he was lovely and a duck, using several other adjectives, more or less appropriately applied, and which would have astonished Noël if he had heard them applied to himself.

Mrs. Ford-Barron, the Rector's mother, had been left a widow early; and she, being a lively, pleasant, jolly, little lady, did not refuse a second offer when it was made to her by Mr. Coningsby, a widower and literary man, who thought her lively manner would be a good antidote to the gloom and despondency which over-study produced in himself. But whether it proved so or not, he had little time to judge, for he died within two years after the marriage; and when she herself, some nine years after, died, she left in charge of her son Edward the wilful little Winifred—a miniature of herself, a little tyrant of ten, who, for the following five years, tyrannized over the yielding Rector, doing everything he wanted when it happened to coincide with her own liking, and making him do everything she wanted, whether it fell in with his wishes or not. Her educa-

tion was of the most erratic order. She knew Latin and Botany splendidly, but she could not sew on a button ; she played in a wild, fanciful manner upon the piano—a manner all her own—mixed with what little training she had ordered Grace Wardwood to give her.

After sitting staring across the Church at her for four consecutive Sundays after Grace's first appearance there, she mounted her pony one day, and went to see her.

Grace was playing when she made her appearance, and when she had looked a few times more at Grace and a few times at the piano, she said, "You'll teach me ; will you?" and there and then established herself as a pupil, coming for a lesson just when she fancied or when the spirit moved her.

She had come for one to-day, but had talked all the while and forgotten about it, and at her last announcement that Noël was a duck, the two stood at the gate, and laughed at the notion, which she made stronger by finishing: "Yes, he is a duck, and he is going to fly away home to-morrow, and we shan't see him any more." She stood with one foot in the stirrup—a funny figure—rather long of the legs, with a very shabby habit, which only partially covered them when she was mounted, and very insufficiently, indeed, when dismounted; a pair of perfectly-fitting dog-skin driving gloves, handsome long boots, a wildly-disarranged Tam-o-shanter surmounting a cloud of fussy fair hair, out of which peeped a small *spirituelle* face ; and, as a finish to her curious outfit, a small, beautifully-jewelled riding-whip, a stroke of which could hardly penetrate the pony's thick coat, but was used to frighten him—



as a whip is sometimes used by indulgent parents to frighten small boys—and was shaken vigorously and threateningly before his eyes, instead of being laid across his back. She sprang into her saddle, saying: “He will be home before me if I don’t hurry up. He is away all day visiting some horrid people, and he promised to teach me jumping on The Ladybird when he comes home; he has been teaching me, you know, only Eddie does not like it” (Eddie was the Rector, *en passant*). “Eddie thinks my ass more suited to *little girls*,” and she patted her pony. “He can’t see or he won’t that I’ve grown out of being little.”

Her “ass” possessed the same good qualities as the Rector’s Dobbin, and was very quiet and sensible, but when his mistress galled him into a better pace, he set back his ears, kicked up his heels, and galloped wildly for half-a-dozen perches or so, and if she was not attending, stopped like a shot, and fell into a pace that allowed of a quiet nap and even a pluck at a mouthful of grass as he passed some exceptionally green knoll by the wayside. But sometimes when he had only just stopped, she would awake out of a dream with a start, and tell him to “March on, Master Lazybones,” and again he would dash on for half-a-dozen perches more, trusting that she would be too busy meditating to trouble him again, but Freda would sometimes wake up even a third time, and thus he had been known to cover half-a-mile in spasmodic galloping before being allowed to stop.

If the pony had only known it, the fault lay all with himself, for it certainly was nothing but the abruptness of his stoppages awoke her. If he had only had a little

more cunning, and instead of meanly shooting her over his head, stopped gradually, he might have had whole hours of dozing upon the road and numberless mouthfuls of sorrel and succulent grasses to regale himself upon. But by one little mistake he left himself open to much irritation at the hands of his young mistress.

When he became Freda's property, his name had been the "Faërie Queene," the reason for his being so called was unknown, but as it was obviously unsuitable, and as the "Faërie Queene's" steed was an ass—why, Freda dubbed him the Ass; and as he was only a shade or two darker than that "snow-white" steed, being of a cream colour, she declared he would do splendidly for going out to meet a knight, and if only she had a pretty lamb to lead along, she would be fully equipped for the journey.

Freda's studies were not deep, but they were all of the "Faërie Queene's" age (but of that book she never got further than the fifth canto), and her ideas were more of knights than of nineteenth century lovers; and although she called Noël a knight and a duck (very far divided animals), it was not by any means with the same feelings she regarded him as Grace did; and if he did go, and they never saw him again, Freda would whip up the ass, and still be looking out for THE knight who was to dance to her piping.

In the meantime she was very pleased to follow the meanderings of her own sweet will, regardless of time or tide spent in the aërial pictures she painted for her own gallery—a gallery which was no small or mean one. She was a very R.A. in the art, and had an advantage



over a Royal Academician, insomuch as those with which she was not satisfied were quickly swept away, and not retained to be a vexation and a heart-burning to the artist. Her canvas was always clean, her paints fresh, her brushes and pallet at hand; and whether the ass was fitful or sluggish, greedy or dozing, galloping or snoozing, it only required a few light swift touches of the pencil of imagination to produce such a picture as never yet did human hand portray.

They are widely apart from pigments and camel's hair. The colours fall from the wings of Aurora, are glorified by the rays of Phoebus, are rarefied by the sweet breath of Zephyrus, are diluted by the dews from the starry heavens, and by the nectar of the honey-cups of earth, are laid on with the brushes of imagery upon the canvas of the mind, specially prepared by their Creator to receive them; laid on in diaphanous tints of amethystine, emerald, rose, and gold—in tints so rare, so pure, so vivid, so artistically and so cunningly touched in, and the whole is such a brilliant, dazzling picture, produced without an effort from the youthful, happy, poetic fancy, that the material artist is, indeed, a happy and a favoured mortal who can produce, even a shadow, a millionth part of the transient pictures of the fancy—lay them on with pigments and camel's-hair—touch them in with black and white—ring them out in dulcet tones, show them up, so that the unimagined may see and be charmed; that they may see, and seeing understand; and understanding or not, may—assuredly *must*—admire and love a thing of such wondrous beauty—a gift from the hand of the Creator, bestowed upon us when we are young and happy, when we see the beauties

of nature—the sunny side of life; when the morning of hope has burst forth with never a cloud upon its serene azure; and then when these fancy paintings begin to grow lesser and dimmer, begin to be dappled over at first with opaque cloudlets, which grow deeper and darker, until, perhaps, the whole is one stern grey, one sombre, cloud-laden sky, wherein not a speck of beauty shows itself, wherein the stern realities of life with relentless hand sweep away the whole structure of our imaginations, and show us the bitter, cruel picture of life, with its countless seams and crosses. Would it not be a joy to us if we could in imagination leave our cares and cranks aside, and once more be happy over such pictures? Because while we paint them, or some other hand paints them for us while we look on, those are the best moments of our lives; we are utterly free from wickedness in those moments; because we are away from the world, out of ourselves, in the regions of fancy that paint things not as they are, but as they ought to be, pure, and good, and lovely; and if we occasionally live in such company, it will reflect upon our lives, helping us to be a little purer, a little better, and a little more lovely—things which certainly none of us can say we do not need. *Helas, hélas!*

But what other people thought of her flights of imagination, in their varied forms, troubled Freda not a whit, for when she awoke out of one of them, she was verily a spirit of mischief, and it was amazing sometimes what came into her light, little pan of a brain. She was the dearest and kindest little soul to those whom she loved, and to those who loved her; but to an enemy of theirs or hers, she could make herself an un-



mitigated vexation ; and she scented envy as unerringly and attacked it as courageously as if she had been born a little retriever, with long ears flopping over her eyes, instead of a little maiden with rebellious locks, which were nearly constantly over her eyes, and out of which the same eyes peered sharp as needles.

However, just now Freda is in congenial company. She pulls down her habit with impatient little plucks, as she settles herself comfortably in her saddle, preparatory, not to hard riding, but to more talk ; and her eyes are kindly in their glances. She flings her hair aside with an impatient gesture, and puts down more firmly the awry 'Shanter.

"Well, now, Grace, is he not a duck ? You saw him, you know. Don't you think him one ?" she asked.

"Well," said Grace, "he did not waddle nor quack, so far as I saw or heard, nor had he wings, nor yet a bill, and as to being like a duck——"

"Like a duck !" said Freda, with supreme scorn. "I did not say he was *like*, I said he *was* a duck. Oh, here are the Kerstones !"

She stopped abruptly until they came up. A little way beyond the gate four roads met—or, rather, two roads crossed (from whence Mr. Morton's farm derived its name), and down one of these the two Kerstones were coming at a rapid pace, Geoffrey whistling, Ambrose switching the hedgerows with a stick—occupations which ceased as soon as they caught sight of the two girls at the gate. A stalwart, handsome pair of boys they looked, who either of them might easily have awakened a tender passion in girlish breasts, and in whose breast

the same little tenderness had been awakened, for both of them had succumbed to Grace's charms, not having seen any other who could compare with her—all other girls of that neighbourhood paling before her. And so, as brothers will, even although not twins, both worshipped at the same shrine, and both their bright eyes grew brighter, and both their ruddy cheeks grew ruddier, as they beheld their divinity only a few yards distant.

But Geoffrey, knowing quite well the state of Ambrose's heart, and being a shade more diffident than Ambrose, made the pony his goal rather than Grace; and the pony's sharp-eyed mistress, singling him out, accosted him as he approached, while Ambrose made straight for the star of his hopes.

Hardly a minute had they been talking, Geoffrey making straight the pony's curb, while he carried on a lively argument with Freda, when the sharp ring of a horse's hoof struck upon their ears, and a few minutes later, Noël Chester came round a curve in one of the roads—that leading towards the south—and was just about to sweep past them, when something familiar struck him in Freda, and he pulled up quickly, and, recognising Grace, sprang to the ground.

“Hillo, Freda, you!” he cried; “and you, too, Miss Wardwood; what luck! I never imagined to see you all here.”

But Freda was in the midst of such a hot discussion with Geoffrey as to whether he or the pony could run fastest, that it was scant notice she bestowed upon Noël.

“You didn't come back to teach me to jump this afternoon, sir, as you promised,” she said, with an



immense assumption of dignity. "Oh, all right. Wait till the next time, then you will see what will happen. I shan't take teaching next time you want to teach me."

Noël protested he was coming as fast as The Ladybird could bring him.

"Oh, it's all right," she again averred. "So is night coming, too, as fast as ever it can. Come on, Geoffrey, I know you can't beat him." And away went the pony and Freda, her dignity cast to the winds, and Geoffrey dashing along by their side in a wild race, to see which should reach the Cross-roads first.

The others stood watching for a minute or too, and then Noël turned to Grace. Ambrose, feeling *de trop*, lifted his cap and went after the others, laughing, but feeling a little put out, too, by the side of this fine gentleman, and a little inclined to kick the stones on the road, and fine gentlemen in general, who come philandering about where nobody wants them.

But Noël was delighted with his luck, as he called it, and did not care or think at all about Ambrose. He was rather exercised in his mind as to how he should best begin what he wanted to say to Grace. He felt such a feeling of strangeness upon him—an embarrassment—a feeling as if they could never become better acquainted; as if they could never break down the conventionalities of new acquaintances, and get upon familiar terms. He felt a foolish desire to rush away, now that the moment had come which he had longed for, and it took all his courage to keep him where he was. He could hardly look at her, and when he did, she seemed in a haze. He did not see at all that her

embarrassment was worse than his own, or see that if he felt disposed to run away, she felt still more disposed to fly away.

At last, with the courage born of desperation, he began to talk, and when he thought of it afterwards he could have sunk into the earth with shame at the donkey he had made of himself. He wished the duck-ponds had opened and swallowed him before he said the foolish things he had said in his recklessness. But it was all right; he need not have felt so bad. If he had been a Cicero it would have been just the same. Grace knew that he was there talking to her, looking at her, and she knew no more. She felt a perfect imbecile, and wished the hills had come down and covered her.

Freda, on her return journey, broke the ice a little for them, and they both burst out laughing at the sight. The pony's long tail streamed out upon the air, so did Freda's hair. The pony, once started to racing, could not be stopped until the spirit moved him, or his breath failed him. So he rushed wildly past, Freda crying to them as she went, "Come on, Noël; he won't stop. Isn't he going it? Let us see who shall be home first;" and "Good-bye, Grace," came like a faint echo upon the air, that needed no answer, but acted upon Noel as a beckoning finger, or a *viva voce*, which said *Allons! Monsieur, allons!* or you may find her in a ditch with a broken neck.

"Will they go home like that?" he said to Grace.

"Oh, no; you will probably find them round the corner. The 'Faërie Queene' does not do much, but he does it with a will when he begins at all."

"Well, then, I had better be off, and I am sorry that



I leave to-morrow, Miss Wardwood. I wish I could stay another couple of weeks."

Grace finds herself reduced to the clever remark—"Oh, indeed," or "really." She is not sure which, but she thinks either is sufficiently notable.

"If I come back during the summer, will you be here?" he asks, excitedly. He feels that if he must go he must say something first, and he holds her hand as if he would never let it go.

"Shall I find you here?"

"Oh, the Rose Show! No one dares to go anywhere until after that," said Grace, never attempting to take back her hand, but letting it stay, as if that is where it should be. "Oh, yes, I shall be here when you come."

"Then, I will come, and for the Rose Show. Don't forget that I expect to find you here, Grace."

But Grace pulls away her hand, which she had evidently forgotten until now; and Noël, growing still more excited, when he had got so far, sprang into his saddle, and, growing bolder still when he got there, looked down into her eyes and said:

"Remember, Grace, I shall come back, so don't be away on your honeymoon, or anything of that sort, recollect—eh—you won't?"

"Blue looked up and brown looked down." The brown were merry, and the blue were shy, but he rode gaily away after Freda and her steed, with the promise ringing in his ears that she would wait for her honeymoon until *after* the Rose Show in June, and found that the runaways were slowly dodging along half-a-mile of perfectly level ground at their leisure, safe and sound in wind and limb.

## CHAPTER VIII.

“WHILE GRASS GROWS AND WATER RUNS.”—BRIDAL DOWRIES.  
—DEPARTURE.

THE Kerstones, father and sons, have gone to begin their new life in a foreign land. Mr. Morton had been as good as his word, and had given them what money was requisite. When they had sold most of their live stock for their rent, instead of the now useless horse, not much had been left. Of course, he did not sell all off, lest they should want to return, if they found that they were not succeeding in their new endeavours, at least for Mr. Kerstone. The boys could push further, but a man whose prime was nearly past was not like a young man, so he had to make a small provision for lack of health, or any such like misfortune. Mr. Morton had promised to help Mrs. Kerstone in whatsoever needed his help whilst they were gone. The difference of circumstances between the two men was not so much that Tom Morton was a cleverer or better-managing man than William Kerstone. Fortune had given them both a goodly portion in the beginning, but with a difference. Mr. Kerstone's many acres were on a life lease, while Mr. Morton's were in perpetuity—a good old lease that is now, alas! seldom or never given in Ireland, and which means a small rent for “as long as



grass grows and water runs"—a pretty considerable time, when one thinks of it—rather greedy-looking upon the part of the tenant, but very desirable, indeed, and necessary, and a most fortunate possession to those who do possess it now-a-days. Besides this, Mr. Morton's private money had been more securely invested. He had married a wife with that more-sought-after daily appendage—a dot. Mrs. Kerstone had brought plenty of land to her husband, but, like his own, on short lease; so times that found the one sinking found the other afloat comfortably. Mr. Morton was a man of much good sense, discernment, and capableness; he was a nephew of our old friend, Mr. Stewart, of the "Valleys of South Down," a chip from the old block, a son of the old house, who had been brought up in the way he should go, and had not departed therefrom as he grew older. Although he lacked many of that gentleman's extravagances, he possessed many of his good qualities, and much—indeed, all, one might safely say—of his kindly disposition, so that Mr. Kerstone felt anything he could do for his wife and daughters in his absence would be done in a kindly manner, and he felt a great sense of relief at the thought.

Mrs. Kerstone dropped her tears in secret, laid them in as one lays in sweet verbena, or sweet lavender, amongst their linen shirts, as she packed them—shirts that she had made with her own hands, bleached them snowy white, and ironed them till they were glossy. All the while she packed she wondered who next would do them up for them, or who would sew on their buttons, or darn their socks, or if they would go undarned or unsewn; and her wonderings were dim,

dazed, and vague, because of the heaviness of her poor heart. And as she turned over her drawers to choose out the best and most suitable, she came upon her bridal linens, immense linen sheets, a little yellow of the edges, because they were only used upon great occasions—sheets that had been spun by her great-grandmother, and woven by her great-grandfather very long ago—over a hundred years ago—and were given by them to their eldest daughter, and to the eldest daughter of every succeeding generation, or upon the occasion of her marriage as part of her dowry; and these very same sheets must have been a handful to the laundress in the days of non-existent mangles when their niveous expanse had to be smoothed out by small flat irons. But they smelled sweet, for Mrs. Kerstone never forgot such treasures long at once, and many were the little bunches of aromatical insect-destroyers tucked within their folds. She turned them over, and sighed deeply—a sigh which sent two large crystal drops upon her lashes down splash upon them. Then she came upon a little pile of children's under-clothing and baby robes, and a smile flashed into her eyes as she recalled Ambrose and Geoffrey (the giants for whose shirts she ought to be searching)—as in vision she recalled the two goggle-headed, wobbly-limbed, wonder-wide eyed, helpless little creatures who used to wear them. She shook them out, and that past time came back like a vivid dream, which melted into the equally dream-like present and the future, when they shall be gone, and she should have only such mementoes to recall them by—and another tear fell upon them. She rolled them up hastily, and placed them in their respective



corners. Why waste time over sentiment, she who ought to be a comforter to her husband, and a voice of wisdom to her sons?

Well! she meant to be both, and for Mrs. Kerstone to mean a thing was equivalent to that thing being done; so she resolutely banished her tears, collected her armful of linens, etcetera, finished her packing, and no voice was more encouragingly hopeful than hers to the last, and she sent them away with a smile upon her lips, which, like an April day, was next moment drenched in showers. But the showers waited until they were gone, and William Kerstone went away with hope in his heart, thinking the worst was passed, and that his wife was reconciled:—hope in his heart, and in the hearts of the boys before whom all the world lay as a playground, one vast field for them and their kismet, to play out the game of destiny:—hope in their hearts which carried them across the bounding billows, through the wilds of the world, to a new land, borne up upon wings mightier than the wings of eagles. “Go thou forth, and fortune play upon thy prosperous helm.”

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## CHAPTER IX.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE ROSE SHOW.—THE CEMETERY OF THE  
RECTOR'S PETS.—HAMILTON THE FOOTMAN, IN LIVERY AND  
OUT OF LIVERY; PERSONATING THE HOUSEKEEPER; WITH  
THE MAIDS AND WITH THE MEN.

THE much-talked of Rose Show had come at last! The Rector had put his heart and soul into it; the amount of energy he had spent upon it would have exhausted—nay, would have done more than exhaust—would have sent to his bed many a man who prided himself upon his energetic habits; yet the Rector was brisk as a bee—all the morning, with his own gardener, Squire Aylesbury's gardener, and three or four non-professional auxiliaries.

Since last we saw him, Mr. Ford-Barron had become "Benedict the Married Man;" not that he had ever in reality forsworn matrimony, nor would it have mattered if he had. That is not the point, nor yet is it the point that it is two months since he entered the holy state. The point is, or rather was, the month of distracting anxiety *he* spent while away on his honeymoon, and the month of distracting anxiety *his* gardener spent in his absence. Such a time! Was ever mortal man married at such an inconvenient season? Were ever two men so—well, it was all those roses. A rose monomania is a very pretty one when



the roses are in full bloom, but at every other time it is a plague, because the month of June is the time for a show *à la grand*, the time the Rector intended to have his; and how could he be happy, even on his honeymoon, in the month of May, when he thought of sharp night-frosts and insect-pests gorging themselves on his precious buds, and he not by to protect them from such tragic blight? Indeed, it had been said that he had been so anxious before certain rose shows (how much more when it *was* to be his own) that he lay awake all night, taking occasional nocturnal rambles amongst the dew-laden rose-trees of his rosarium, lest any hurt should befall the finest, most fragrant blooms that were on the morrow to add yet another honour and glory to the renowned name of Mr. Ford-Barron, Rector of Mossleigh.

Indeed, there were those who would vouch he was seen standing with an umbrella over certain *beaucoup aimé* roses, in hopes that the rain would stop; but we are not prepared to uphold statements made by those who have a bent towards fiction, because, if we were, there are all those stories about manuring which floated about, exaggerated a trifle by every retailer, whether because they could not help themselves, or whether they wanted to improve upon it. Kālī, who knows? But who could suppose that the Rector could keep up a burying-ground for all the dead animals about the country, if he happened to raise a sarcophagus in the shape of a rose-tree over his oldest and favourite horse? And yet there was that story about a sheep that had tumbled over a precipice, and met an untimely end; and then there was that poor old blind dog the Rector

had rescued from a wicked monster who was maltreating him, but which did not live long to enjoy the good quarters into which he had at last fallen. Where were they all?

It is really not to be supposed that all those beauties were flesh-eaters. "That, ahem! capricious, shy, but loveliest of all Queen Flora's votaries, the *recherché*, delicate Cloth-of-Gold (*Noisette*), ahem! the florist's choicest buttonhole Venus, its buds like golden bells, a grand goblet, fit to hold nectar for the gods—a true chalice, meet for the coronation of fairy kings, ahem!" The Rector did not think his listeners were thinking of the world, the flesh, etc., while he introduced them to these beauties. He would not for a moment have believed it, if anyone had told him, that all the while he was showing off their charms, there were speculations without number going on as to whether it was a goat or a sheep, or an old horse, or half-a-dozen other equally detestable things, that had been the stimulus which produced such magnificent luxuriance upon the best south wall. It was quite true that he manured liberally, very liberally—(it was also true that he had a peculiar desire to find a last resting-place for waifs and strays; but who shall say for why?)—as the contents of one of the marquees upon the back lawn went to prove. He had besought the concurrence and assistance of everyone who had pretensions to rose-growing in the neighbourhood, and the result was a goodly display.

The second marquee was devoted to such vegetables, fruit, and farm produce as could be got at the season from amongst his parishioners of every grade, grown in



their gardens, and under glass, if they were so minded to exhibit their powers and ideas of cultivation. For these there were prizes, so this marquee was full to overflowing: butter, eggs, honey, strawberries, cucumbers, vegetable marrows of immense circumference, tomatoes, beans, peas (which the youngsters made love to surreptitiously), along with the gooseberries and currants, not once, but many times, so that early in the evening their baskets had but a poor show. Yet, withal, it was a true cornucopia, and teemed with the fruits of plenty, and pride beamed from the countenances of the ambitious exhibitants.

The third marquee, red-and-white striped, was for refreshments; and the whole three were pitched in a group upon the back lawn. The Rector was very tender as to the trampling of his lawns, which were like great sweeps of emerald velvet, so trim, and untrodden, and verdantly-green were they, dotted over with a brilliant glory of bloom, sweetening the scene like dainty dimples in a rounded cheek.

The house itself was old, handsome, and picturesque, raised upon a terrace, with long French windows opening on to the gravelled walks. Its walls were covered with Virginia creeper, purple and white clematis, and Gloire-de-Dijon roses, "in all its five reputed tints" (as the Rector was wont to say with pride): "buff, yellow, orange, fawn, and salmon; perfect in size, form, colour, endurance, and perfume; the first and last to bloom of all roses, and the most robust and hardy of the tea-scented China roses."

Some very delightful features which marked the Rector's grounds now, when the glory of the roses and

of summer itself is richest, are the rose fountains and arches. The most handsome arch is that which leads into the rosarium, which, *en passant*, lies towards the meridian sun, due south, and is protected on three sides with close hedges of rose trees of lesser value, or, perhaps, hardier varieties, and thick evergreens, to keep off any ungenial winds. And over the gateway is the afore-mentioned arch, thickly draped with Maréchal Niels, whose pendulous habits shows here to greater advantage the charm and splendour of their golden blossoms. From beneath one can see up into their perfectly-formed hearts and delicately-tinted petals, and taste to the full the sweetness of their beauty. The rose fountains are tall standards with their top branches very long, bent down earthwards, and when well manured are a perfect cascade of bloom, some of delicate blush, or deepest, richest crimson; others, softest pink, snowy white, golden yellow, or purplish red, shedding their intoxicating odours upon the soft zephyr breezes which play out and in amongst them, kissing them coyly on their beauteous cheeks, or scattering the petals of those whose glory has fled, upon the beds and upon the short grass around, like veritable snowflakes, or downy feathers dropped from the wings of Queen Flora as she views with happy eyes her floral-decked gardens in their brightest summer garb.

The scenic effect is lovely in its state of perfect cultivation, with the rays of a June sun pouring its warmth over all, much too warm for the wild birds to come out of their leafy screen; but a blackcap (*Curruca atricapilla*) sings a madrigal, and a cuckoo (*Cúculus conórus*) softly blows a few lazy notes. A dusty



sparrow twitters, and indoors a canary sings a joyous strain in the cool behind the half-drawn sun-blinds, while the maids make a pleasant chatter running to and fro, as they spread forth one of the grandest feasts under which Mr. Ford-Barron's mahogany has ever groaned.

There is to be a grand luncheon at the Rectory for such of the gentry as are available at this season to meet the great lady who is to open the Show and the judges on the occasion. It is the first entertainment Mrs. Ford-Barron has given of any importance since her arrival, and she hovers over her table just as anxiously as the Rector over his roses, and directs her two maids and footman. I was nearly saying three maids, but when one is closely observant, they will discover that one *is* a footman. It takes close observation to do it. His cheeks are just as smooth, and shiny, and pink, and his voice as high a soprano as any one of them—indeed, more so—for one had a contralto, the other a mezzo; and when one thinks of it, it was only Hamilton himself who had a high, soft, girlish voice, most unmasculine, but none the less a favourite in the kitchen on that account, for it was quite astonishing how Hamilton could keep his two companions in humour, and smooth away jealousies, all the while with an arm round each; and if they ever got out of humour, it was not Hamilton's fault, nor his hair they felt inclined to pull, but, very foolishly, one another's, which was great diplomacy on Hamilton's part, for Zenanas in this country, I take it, would not be easily managed, and would be a handful to their owners. (It must be the fault of the climate.)

Hamilton found it so sometimes with one he could dismiss at a moment's notice; but, on the whole, he kept things swimming pretty smoothly, or, rather, skipping or sliding pretty smoothly, for that was his usual "gait o' gawin'." His usual mode of transit down the mosaic floor of the entrance hall was a long slide, and it was quite bewildering the way in which he could skip and slide round the chairs and tables when waiting at table, with now and then, for variety sake, a little trot, when the patter of his light-soled boots upon the polished floor was quite diverting.

Talk about deft-handed waiting maids, the way in which Hamilton could hand the *entrées*, for grace and dexterity, with little skips and runs, and flourishes of his napkin between whiles, and a thousand and one gymnastic performances between the skips and runs, surpassed any waiting-maid that ever professed the calling—took the shine out of them entirely, left them in the shade for ever and a day. He was as good as a play—grace personified, skill consummated, and his suasive suggestions in the ear of his victim might make a gourmand of any man, for who could refuse what was so temptingly popped under his nose, with a piquant whisper in his ear that instantly touches the chord of desire?

Hamilton was born to be a footman, or a waiter—the article, like poets, are born, not made—and he was a gem of the first water. When other boys were playing at marbles, or ball, or leap-frog, or shinty (*i.e.*, hockey), or any one of all the other games dear to the heart of a schoolboy, Jimmy (he was not known as Hamilton in those days; he only attained that dignity



with a livery and buttons) was strutting about dressed in his mother's skirts, for of all things Jimmy loved skirts best. And when he could not get a skirt to dress himself in, he fell back upon aprons, he liked the flop of them against his long bare legs; but, if he was successful in obtaining a skirt he was in his element. Although Jimmy was tall, so was his mother, and her skirts sailed gracefully behind him, like a peacock's tail; he held it up mincingly in front, like a belle of forty years ago, and peeped over his shoulder to see how it was getting along behind, and if the wind had got into it and swelled it out like a balloon, Jimmy swelled with pride and satisfaction, too, and the pair of them went along in high feather.

It was the wisdom of experience that made Jimmy hold up his skirt in front, rather than vanity, because, if it happened to trip him up and send him rolling in the mud, the result was not good for Jimmy; or, if his long naked feet happened by chance to thrust themselves through the front of it in a place not made for his feet, why, Jimmy's absent friends talked about him—that is, his ears glowed from the soundness of the boxing bestowed upon him by that skirt's owner. His mother had never been blessed with a daughter, but she often declared that she had never felt the want of one, because of Jimmy. He was better than any girl could possibly be; he could wash the dishes, make up a fire, sweep up the floor, feed the fowls, and make pancakes; and as to needlework, Jimmy could dress and nurse a doll beautifully, knit garters on two rusty needles, yards long, and sew on a button like a tailor—that is, he always remembered to leave a good long neck on it,

and twist the thread about twenty times round that, so that it would not pull the piece of cloth to which it was sewed out the first time one wanted to button it.

But Jimmy had not altogether got rid of his liking for feminine garments when he went to the Rectory. So one evening, having dressed himself up very neatly in a flowing dress of the housekeeper's, in that good lady's absence, he covered his bony, sunburnt hands with a pair of white thread mittens, arranged coquettishly a broad-leafed hat of the housemaid's upon his well-oiled, sleek hair, with a thick veil, and a sunshade in his hand, he sallied forth to enjoy the fresh air in the gloaming. He imitated the stately walk, and modest, polite manner of speaking of Mrs. Battle, as he walked along, so successfully that when anyone met him and remarked, "Fine evening, mem," they were quite unsuspecting, and saluted her in their usual way. Jimmy's "beautiful evening" was a curiosity, and a masterpiece in deception; but it was so splendidly done that Jimmy was nearly betraying his identity, for it was only on very special occasions that Mrs. Battle was so magnificent. However, it passed, only causing them to look a little more closely at her, and without quite forming the thought, think her odd a bit.

Mrs. Battle was far superior to such things as walking out of an evening with a young man, or any such flighty, giddy-headed goings-on; so much so, indeed, that it was with elevated, scornful nose she received the advances of a certain portly sergeant of the R.I.C., deigning him not a glance, and only the briefest of monosyllabic replies; and it was not a little



astonishment to that gentleman, as he strolled along smoking idly, when he met, as he supposed, Mrs. Battle, to find her not only willing to speak to him, but actually pushing up to him, and inviting his society. "Gad," he afterwards said, as he related it of her, "you could have knocked me down with a feather." Jimmy, flushed with the success of meeting and passing unrecognised half-a-dozen people, bethought himself of taking a "rise" out of the sergeant, and boldly addressed himself to him. The sergeant had been having a little strong beer with a friend, and was in both a jolly and an amorous mood, and was only too delighted to play the gallant to Mrs. Battle, and was not in a position to be too observant, which just suited Jimmy. Besides, he had always sworn that Mrs. Battle should see the day she would be glad, "domned glad, sir," to get the offer of an officer of the Royal Irish Constabulary.

But he did not behave in the way he had said he would do when that time came. He intended to laugh her to scorn, and to spurn her, when she offered herself to him. But, now that time had come, he was all delighted graciousness, and hardly a minute elapsed until he offered her his arm, and Jimmy, with charming bashfulness, laid his white thread mitten upon the golden stripes of his sleeve, and simpered, and was sweetly polite.

"What a time it is, *dear* Mr. Peeler, since I saw you last!" said Jimmy.

"Time! dang me, ma'am, if it isn't your own fault that," said the sergeant. "A handsome lady like yourself has only to say the word, and the gintle-

men are ridy to git down on their knees at wanst. Gad, an' not a bid of a loi I'm telling ye, either."

The gallant sergeant removed his arm from the clinging fingers, and slipped it round the lady's waist without any protest on her part; indeed, there was rather a tendency towards reclining on his shoulder in the big hat, only Jimmy was afraid of it coming off, and had to be careful.

"*Dear Mr. Peeler,*" murmured Jimmy, and squeezed his large hand against his heart.

"Gad, ma'am, an' it's a sly one ye wor all this time; but that's the ladies all over, trying to break the gintlemen's hearts, threatening them so crewl. Faith, he wasn't so far wrong, he knew the wemen, the fellow who sings: 'If for widows you die, learn to kiss, not to sigh,'" and the sergeant hugged Jimmy in a big embrace.

Jimmy insinuatingly held up his smooth pink cheek, covered with the veil, and the sergeant suited the action to his own words, and kissed him warmly on its rounded surface. It was not quite so plump as Mrs. Battle's would have been, but the sergeant was not in a mood to pass many remarks.

"Oh, you naughty man," said Jimmy, playfully, and tweaked his moustache rather sharply. "But why don't you come up to the Rectory, and have a nice comfortable little bit of supper with myself some evening, when the Rector is not at home you know?"

Jimmy set his head coily on one side, and looked up at him in the twilight.

"With all the pleasure in loif. Gad, ma'am, as I said before, ye have only to say the word, an' this here gint——"



“Oh, I must be off,” whispered Jimmy. He saw figures looming round a corner a few perches off. “I’ll expect you, then, *dear* Mr. Peeler, *soon, soon.*”

But Mr. Peeler meant to have another chaste embrace, and hugged Jimmy into a breathless condition, and the figures were nearly at hand. Jimmy broke loose, gathered up his skirts, and disappeared in the gathering twilight, with a length of limb displayed, and a rapidity that astonished the sergeant, who would not have believed Mrs. Battle capable of such exertions.

“But ye niver know the wemen,” he reflected; “they’re the divel, who would have believed it was in her. Gad, and she’s a foin woman, an’ I’ll take a turn round to see how she’s coming on some evening.”

It was not without quakings Jimmy saw him making his way towards the back regions of the Rectory a few evenings later. He dreaded the result; he feared the sergeant was running himself needlessly into danger, and was not so ungenerous but that he would like to give him a little hint, a little warning, so he skipped out of one of the long French windows, and waylaid him.

“Isn’t it a nice evening, sergeant?” said he, wishing to insinuate himself into his good graces. “The master is not at home”—a needless piece of information, but Jimmy hardly knew how to tell him to beware. “But, if you want to see him, he’ll be home pretty soon. Miss Freda is not at home, either, and the house-keeper is busy at her jam; so, if you want to see the master——”

Jimmy stopped with the air, “If you do, why, I

shall tell him you have called, and are likely to call again; so don't urge it any further;" and thinking, by giving him plenty of information, he might avert the catastrophe, but the visitor was not so easily stopped.

"Gad, an' it's Mrs. Battle herself I want to see, then," said he, and made for the open door, where he saw her dignified figure for a moment appear. She looked at him superciliously as he came nearer.

"Ye see I've kept my word, ma'am, an' here I am," said he, but a pang of doubt went through him as he looked.

"Did you say the Rector was not at home, Hamilton?" she asked, with asperity, not looking at the sergeant, but at Jimmy.

"Yes, indeed, Mrs. Battle; yes, indeed."

Jimmy was never known to contradict anybody in his life, and had the temper of an angel. No matter what anyone said, he agreeably said, "Yes, indeed," whether it was against himself or not. However, as "Yes, indeed," was the truth, and the proper answer this time, and Jimmy saw war in the near distance, and having a guilty conscience upon the head, he answered all the more readily: "Yes, indeed, Mrs. Battle; yes, indeed."

"Upon my loif, my dear ma'am, I don't want to see his Riverence at all, not a one but your own bloomin' self. Come, ma'am, ye havn't such a short memory; ye remember the evening before last, well enough, and what happened under the trees. Ye weren't so stand-offish then. Ye don't remember the nice comfortable little supper at all, ma'am; now do ye? Nothing at all about such things."



Mrs. Battle began to stare stonily at him, and he, thinking to soften her heart by some of his endearments bestowed upon Jimmy, boldly put his arm round her portly waist, thinking that it had grown considerably since two days ago.

Jimmy, with a sudden rush of memory, thought to himself, "Lordy, he'll smother her." But Mrs. Battle was not smothered; a sound cuff sent the sergeant's round cap spinning along the muddy path, where it seemed to pick out all the little water pools to trundle through; it also made him withdraw his arm to rub the affected part. Mrs. Battle, calling her dogs to her, caused him to beat a hasty retreat, but not till the cross old pug had torn a mouthful out of his nice new, well-cut trousers, and the wicked wiry-haired little Irish terrier had left the muddy imprint of his four paws high up on his back, and might have had a piece out of his fat neck for *his* supper if Jimmy had not caught the nasty creature by the collar, gave him a kick, and sent him yelping back to his insulted mistress.

"Gad," thought the sergeant, "wemen's the duowel." He picked up his wet and dirty cap, and wiped it with his handkerchief, ending, rather viciously: "Well, dang me, if they're not."

Jimmy left Mrs. Battle to recover her temper over her jam, and betook himself to his own pantry; but the result of this escapade was—he always had a liking for slipping an arm round the waist of a pretty maid—rather a peculiar one, when he saw the trouble it had brought another man into. But people never will take a warning.

Hamilton was great friends with Watson, of the

Cross-roads, and when he sauntered there of an evening he admired the ruddy plumpness of Minnie and Rosey; but, happening to cast an eye towards Watson when he was about to take one on each arm, something in that person's eye—a danger signal perhaps—made him drop Minnie and confine his attentions to Rosey. Hamilton was no warrior, and if a war loomed up he always hoisted the white flag of truce, became so conciliatory and inoffensive that it was quite impossible to pick a quarrel with him; but as there are some folks who would quarrel with angels themselves, why, when Jimmy came across those persons, he gave them leg bail for his honesty—he considered retreat the better part of valour. But all this happened some time ago, and Mrs. Battle is not at the Rectory now. She was a lady who never served under a mistress, so when Mr. Ford-Barron announced the possibility of such a person, Mrs. Battle packed up her alls, and betook herself to pastures new. Then there came a new cook, with a beautiful, catchy English accent, and Hamilton had a jolly time skipping about and keeping peace between her and the housemaid, who knew his tricks, and kept a pretty close eye upon him. He thought cook had the prettiest voice and accent he had ever heard, and exerted all his powers to imitate it; he did not know that what he called “that delightful little twirl up at the last of the words” meant Cockneyism—so Jimmy, in his ignorance, lived in bliss, and spoke beautiful English.



## CHAPTER X.

PREPARING STILL FOR THE SHOW.—A PILLOW FIGHT ON THAT MORNING BY WAY OF USHERING IN THE DAY'S AMUSEMENTS EARLY.—MR. MORTON A LEVELLER.—MORE PREPARATIONS STILL.—THE HOUR HAS COME.

HAMILTON and the maids bustled about, putting the last finishing touches. The plate, and glass, and china sparkled and glittered like a thousand mirrors, reflecting each other over and over again in their highly-polished surface. Plate powder and wash leather had not been spared, and the result was a dazzling array that did credit to Hamilton's department. Mrs. Ford-Barron had herself arranged the flowers, which were a dream of loveliness. Roses, she had thought, were rather much *en evidence* to-day; so white lilies, ranging from the superb *gloriosa* to the delicate lily-of-the-valley, decked the board, mingled with festoons of Panama fern and luxuriant maidenhair, out of which peeped the attical eucharist lily and the stately arum, children of purity, of elegance and grace. She was bending over them with satisfaction, giving a last touch here and there, turning a vase here, giving a lily a more artistic set there, pulling out a fringe of fern fronds in another place, generally finishing it off to her liking, when the Rector appears through one of the windows. He has at last got everything arranged in

the marquees, and the men have closed up the doors and gone off to enjoy a well-earned rest and an early dinner.

Mrs. Ford-Barron turns to him with beaming face from her task, and asks him if he has everything finished.

“Quite, darling!” he answers.

She slips her arm through his, and leads him off to the morning room, where she has a tray of refreshments waiting for him. It is with a great sigh of relief he sinks into the large chair she pulls forward for him, and with great pleasure and contentment he allows her to minister to his wants. While they sit in the cool, shady room, he puts an arm round her shoulders as she sits upon a hassock at his feet, presumably to rest; but both their minds dance with excitement that will not be suppressed until the cause of it all is over, and has passed away. But the cool shade, and rest of body, and light refreshment are great restorers, and with them they while away the time until the guests arrive.

Grace Wardwood is to be one of the guests at the Rectory, as well as an exhibitor in the Show, and excitement is also the order of the day at the Cross-roads, as, indeed, it is in every other house in the parish. The day is one great general holiday, and gala preparations employ man, woman, and child for miles round. It began very early in the morning at the Cross-roads. Grace woke early, with the first pæan of the lark, and the great, streaming, finger-like rays of the rising sun. A myriad of happy hopes and expectations flooded her heart; for was it not the time Noël Chester had said he would come again? and was she not



to see him once more? A thousand things she planned to say to him, and imagined thousands of things he might say to her. In the midst of these happy thoughts, her bedroom door opened, and Georgie's white, bullety head appeared.

"Hillo, Auntie Grace, I'm coming to have a pillow fight. Are you awake? There now, May; you're not to come. Nobody wants you. Little girls can't play; they are all too small. You should not be awake yet. Go away back to your cot."

He pushed May out, and May pushed herself in, and both pushed till Georgie stumbled, and the two little figures in their night-dresses rolled on the carpet. Georgie, being the stronger, extricated himself first, took a race, and bounced into Auntie Grace's bed. May, not to be behind, gathered herself up, took a race, and flung herself upon the side of the bed, and clung desperately there, and whined till she was lifted in. Such fun ensued; they staggered through the bed, tumbled over one another, tripped on their night-dresses, and popped down suddenly; got up again only to roll over once more, laughing, flushed, and breathless. At last Georgie fell out, or nearly, for, as he was going, Auntie Grace caught his foot, so that it was in mid-air he hung rather than bumping against the floor. The row grew boisterous; May screamed with delight and baffled rage; Georgie yelled and pranced with exuberant spirit, and Grace laughed until she was unable to move, or throw another pillow at Georgie. They were all so engaged they did not see Mrs. Morton bearing down upon them until she caught Georgie under one arm, and May under the other, and bore

them away wriggling, kicking, screaming, thinking it was Auntie Grace was bearing them away bodily.

But when they discovered it was their mother they begged her to come and have more. "It was grand," Georgie declared, and when she could not be persuaded he kicked out his little fat short leg—"playing at a wild horse," he called it—all the time he was undergoing the process of dressing. So, when Grace was left to herself, she was quite early, and had plenty of time for the arrangement of her roses before breakfast.

She was one of the Rector's most successful pupils, and he had taken great pleasure in teaching her. He had given her settings in November, and had come time after time to see how they were progressing. In February he had shown her how to bud the briars, and inserted fine, healthy buds from his best roses. Success crowned their efforts, and Grace had now a large variety. What with these new ones and the old ones, which grew plentifully at the Cross-roads, well stimulated with mulching and liberal manuring, she had a large number to choose from. She sent in a case of twenty-four specimens, which Mr. Morton declared could hold their own anywhere, and did credit to the amount of labour bestowed upon them. When she had labelled and arranged them, Watson conveyed them to the Rectory, where the gardener fixed the cases and arranged the fresh moss about the stalks, as he had undertaken to do for every case sent in.

Mrs. Morton was also an exhibitor, although, as she said herself, it was only to patronise the affair that she contributed at all, for anyone like herself, who had gained first prize three years in succession for best



cream butter at the North-East Agricultural Society's Annual Show, might well consider their reputation as a butter-maker assured, and it was only to encourage and keep in countenance some who had not ventured so far, or accomplished such great things. So she sent specimens of her best art, dressed in fresh parsley, several jars of honey, and half-a-dozen tiny baskets of strawberries, and a large basketful of the latter to Mrs. Ford-Barron to swell her dessert; for having heard, *sub rosa*, that the slugs had made a raid upon the Rector's, owing to the amount of time required for the Show, she deemed theirs might neither be so large nor so ripe as her own.

Mrs. Ford-Barron, having heard so much about the Mortons and their kindness to her brother, had become very friendly with them after her arrival. There had been such visiting backwards and forwards, and every time Mrs. Ford-Barron wondered more and more that Noël had never mentioned Grace, never spoken of her except in the most casual, distant, far-away fashion, and that only when the Rector brought up the subject. She must, therefore, run away with the idea that Noël was quite indifferent to handsome girls in general, and Grace in particular, and said to herself: "Oh, yes, just like those self-satisfied, cool, collected men; they don't fall in love, they marry from common-sense motives." As a rule, she prided herself upon the cool calmness of her brother, thought him the handsomest, most charming, and most acceptable young gentleman imaginable, and wondered not at all that an immense number of pretty girls should worship at his shrine, his sister included in the number. But she declared herself

“astonished,” when she saw Grace, “that any man could keep his head, for, if she were a man, she would fall in love right away with Grace Wardwood,” and considered Noël quite an iceberg for not even having noticed her. Grace played for her dreamy, enchanting music, and Mrs. Ford-Barron was bewitched.

Grace, on the other hand, loved to look at the Rector’s dainty little wife. Her eyes, now laughing and merry, now richly liquid and deeply dark, seemed to her to be Noël’s eyes looking at her from beneath the same well-marked straight brows, the same clear olive-tinted skin, and as near an imitation as nature could produce of that young gentleman’s nose. But Grace was partial. She considered Noël’s much finer, and his teeth more dazzling, although his sister’s were a fair imitation, and were quite captivating when those of the superlative degree of eminence were not by to outshine them. So it is not to be greatly wondered at if those two ladies struck up a mighty friendship.

But what again utterly “amazed” Mrs. Ford-Barron was, that Grace had ever seen the light of Noël’s countenance, and had not fallen down to worship—was not entirely subdued, enthralled; deeply, desperately, for ever and a day, in love with him. Strange that Mrs. Ford-Barron’s convictions should all be in the negative. ’Tis greatly to be feared our young hero and heroine were very deceptive; but possibly that good little lady’s eyes would get opened one day, and then she would be lost in wonderment at herself, her own blindness or incapacity to judge of the diverse ways love has of declaring itself in different people.

Grace would willingly have listened for hours if



Mrs. Ford-Barron had talked of nothing else but Noël, a sign she might have noted if she had had eyes to see or ears to hear. As it was, his name was constantly popping in, and Mrs. Ford-Barron only thought Grace delightful for listening to her and never wanting to talk any herself, a thing Mrs. Ford-Barron would have found beyond the bounds of possibility, for if ever a woman loved to chatter in a sweet, charming, pretty way that woman was she. So, needless to say, Grace was invited to luncheon at the Rectory on this great gala day.

Mr. Morton was invited too, but had said he had never before lunched with a Countess, or an Archdeacon either, and as it was possible he might never do so again, he thought it might put him out too much to do it now. So he declined the honour some folks wish to brag of—dining with eminent people, if only once in their life; but Mr. Morton was not of the “tovy” sort, as the Scotch say, and never would have dreamed of doing such a thing. But Mrs. Morton was privately much disappointed, for if she did not desire to go about puffing and swelling like an over-gorged frog about having once lunched with titled people, yet she was not above the weakness of looking at a lady dressed *dans bon ton*, whom everybody acknowledged there never was such another for beauty or magnificence, graciousness or dignity—wonderful to see, wonderful to hear! A Venus, a Diana, an Helen, robed in Worth’s latest dreams and creations.

Who, then, shall wonder at Mrs. Morton? Besides, there was all Mrs. Ford-Barron’s galaxy of wedding presents, all her bridal splendour to be laid out for the first time *en masse, à la grand*.

Mrs. Morton had only seen glimpses of them before, and rumour said they were a sight to make your eyes wink, so brilliant and numerous were they, as good as a silversmith's shop. And, above all, there was the luncheon itself. What did not rumour say about that? Such cooking; such tossing, whisking, and flipping; such baking, boiling, and stewing, and roasting, and toasting; such cargoes of unheard-of things had arrived; such wonders with French names, and German names, and English names, and things that nobody knew the names of at all, or had ever seen or known to penetrate to the heart and wilds of an Irish bog before.

Who, then, shall wonder at Mrs. Morton? who reproach, who point the finger of scorn? But Mr. Morton was obstinate, stubborn, pigheaded, and, what he himself called in horses, "rusty" upon occasions. It was all pride in Mr. Morton. He—Thomas Morton—sit below any man's salt, play audience for them, knuckle down, truckle under, grovel, flunky, toadeat, soap up, cringe for favours, fawn obsequiously; he, a servile fellow, pushing up to the big people! Mr. Morton forgot at such times all about his prayer-book, and all about submitting himself lowly and reverently to his betters. He was a relation of Mr. Stewart's, recollect; he neither could nor would submit himself to anybody; he snorted and pranced about; he stormed, and fumed, and blustered; he considered *himself* one of nature's own noblemen (he was modest upon such occasions). A man of honour was a gentleman, was he not? A man of weight (fifteen stone) and influence and integrity was better than bankrupt lordlings, was he not? (Between ourselves, he was a bit of a



leveller.) No, he wouldn't go; not a step! Mrs. Morton might go herself if *she* wanted to be looked down upon, belittled and walked over; but *he* wouldn't, not he! and he got himself into a fine puff of a rage. Mrs. Morton was discreet. She knew her man, and bided her time. She was too good a wife to ask him to go where she plainly saw he disliked infinitely to go. He was so soothed and petted and cuddled up that he was in high feather about the show, in a jolly good temper, kindly, genially pleasant with everybody over it; allowed himself to be collared, and cuffed, and brushed, and spruced up to the last degree, taking a sly little look out of the corner of his eyes to see if his wife was very much disappointed about the luncheon, and when he saw how serene was her happy, good face, kissed her heartily, after she finished knotting his tie for him, by way of reward, thanks, and gratitude for her leniency towards him; and the whole party were in great good humour.

Grace was in a flutter as she dressed. Noël was come, she had heard. Freda had kept her posted in every detail, not so much to give Grace the news as to relieve her own overcharged bosom to a sympathetic confidante. And so was Miss Sylvia Manfield come. Grace had heard of Miss Sylvia Manfield, not from Freda, as Freda did not know anything more about that lady than Grace did herself, but from Mrs. Ford-Barron.

"Oh, yes," she had said, "dear Noël will come for the Show, and probably stay a few weeks, and also a great friend of mine, a school friend, and likely to be something more soon, we all hope so, anyhow. My

father wishes it, so does Sylvia's father, so do I, and I know Sylvia does too," and she laughed. "Her father has heaps of money, and it would be an excellent match for dear Noël. You must see Sylvia, she is so fine-looking, tall, calm, and stately ; such a quantity of wavy, flossy hair, almost flaxen, with just a tinge of yellow ; great blue eyes ; she is so lazy she hardly ever takes the trouble to open them wide. Oh, yes, you must see Sylvia ! Probably Noël will end in marrying her, only he is so hard to please, so hard to please." Her voice took a little wailing tone at the hopelessness of Noël ever being pleased. "One never knows what young men will do now-a-days ;" she made a grimace and laughed again. "But it is very probable, we should all like it, and very likely it will end so."

She was quite unconscious that any other wish could be amongst the assembled three (Mrs. Morton, Grace, and herself). She might have raised her eyebrows superciliously if she could have read their hearts, and considered them just a little presumptuous ; but as it was, she was quite pleasant in the thought that in all likelihood things would settle themselves down comfortably just as she liked them. Things always do in this "weary wale of tears," don't they ?

So Sylvia Manfield had been a pang to Grace, but to-day she had forgotten all about her, and thought only of Noël. Her heart fluttered. She wondered if he remembered her or thought of her—wondered if he remembered the hyacinths, or if his dark eyes would look into hers, as they had done at the gate, when he promised to come again.

All her bashfulness was upon her when she entered



and was ushered in by Hamilton, in a new livery, who skipped before her, as if the excitement of the whole affair was concentrated in his light heels.

“My dear, you look charming,” said Mrs. Ford-Barron, as she kissed her and passed her on. “Charming! Noël, you know Miss Wardwood, don’t you? Come and entertain her. Ah, my dear Squire Aylesbury, delighted, I am sure.”

Her voice seemed to keep up a perpetual little silvery stream of reception greetings, and a soft hum of polite chatter filled the long drawing-room.

Grace found herself in one of the windows, with Noël looking down at her, a little browner—a little thinner, perhaps—but the very same Noël that had ridden away upon the fleet Ladybird on that winter’s evening months ago.

Noël Chester had certainly not forgotten her, but he had half-forgotten how exquisitely beautiful she was. He had thought of her in a multitude of different lights, but now they seemed to him to have lacked colour—to have been tame pictures—washed-out affairs beside this glowing creature in her silver-grey, clinging garments—her blushes coming and going behind a filmy white veil, that softened their warmth as the down softens the peach’s bloom.

An Attic maiden he thought her—the embodiment of freshness, sweetness, and purity:—a lovely lily, a child of light, a queen of morning, a jewel amongst fair women, a star of night, Luna herself.

He lost himself in metaphors. None of them half-satisfied him. They did not express a hundredth part of the admiration awakened in him anew as he gazed

upon her when she stood before him with drooping eyes—eyes that were only now and then lifted to his, but they had a merry sparkle in their violet depth before they fell under his ardent gaze, that sent an electric tingle coursing through his veins, gave him a little shock—a feeling of giddiness—made him half tipsy, and wholly bewildered.

The murmur of voices swelled. Gaily dressed ladies fluttered and flashed about. Stout gentlemen with sonorous voices twirled their heavy watch-chains and fingered the seals upon them with great pomp and grandeur. Half-a-dozen perfumes mingled—white rose, in honour of the occasion; sweet violets, because some ladies are devoted to that alone; essences and attars floated on the air. The buzz floated on the air; Jimmy floated on the air—he was beyond either sliding or skipping—he sailed along. Cook fussed, housemaid flitted, carriages rolled, guests arrived—the very hour itself had come, and luncheon with it.

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## CHAPTER XI.

MISS O'CONNOR O'NEILL.—SOME OLD FRIENDS.—THE HON. TOM AND MISS SYLVIA MANFIELD.—THE TENDER PASSION.—THE RECTOR'S DOUBTS AND FEARS.—FREDA'S FEELINGS AND SQUIRE AYLESBURY'S FEELINGS.

THE aroma of the viands was delicious; the musical murmur of voices, where none were strikingly audible, most seductive; the tinkle and clatter of plate and china were stirring, the service neat and swift, the cooking faultless; the hostess, as a result, pleased—satisfied, and at her ease.

Her pretty, soft voice mingling with the sonorous tones of the Archdeacon at one end of the table, while at the other the persuasive accents of the Rector, suggestive of the intoning of the service—a sing-song inflection—as if he were so saturated in it he could never leave off chanting—commingled with the clear, sweet, flute-like notes of the magnificently-dressed, grandly-proportioned, agreeable Countess of Joscelin.

Deep basses, high trebles, grave baritones, rich contraltos, clear tenors, soft mezzos buzzing on every side.

“Ah, well, indeed, then, and it's queer times!” said a stout old lady to the gentleman at her side. “When my uncle, the Judge, was alive, it's many a queer story he told of the law, to be sure.”

Miss O'Connor O'Neill was a stout, wheezy old Irish

lady, who considered herself of vast importance—quite the highest lady in the neighbourhood, or, indeed, any other neighbourhood, for that matter, although their glory was now somewhat faded. She considered that not a Countess, nor even a Duchess, should take precedence of her, for was she not descended by direct line from the Kings of Ireland? She could trace her special branch of the family (if only you gave her sufficient time) back to the days of King Conor MacNessa himself and his Red Branch Knights of Ulster, without a hitch or flaw, toddle out and in of the intricacies of nineteen centuries as if it were only the past ten or twenty years, and she herself had a perfect personal recollection of all the events which caused the rise and fall of the Irish Nation during that period.

But, although their lineage might be direct, it was not quite unmixed, as there was a slight link of relationship between them and Mr. Ford-Barron, who had also pretensions to having blue blood in his pudgy, dumpy little body—the kind of body one is forced to admit does sometimes accompany blue blood, while red blood, or whatever colour the blood of plebeians may be—if they can be said to have blood at all—will oftentimes have the cheek to be pretty and graceful and well-bred, like Mrs. Ford-Barron, who, if she had *any* blood, it was not worth speaking about. As Miss O'Connor O'Neill remarked of her, when she heard of the marriage, "but no doubt poor, dear Edward would find her money useful." So birth and money were (according to her lights) a very good set-off against each other.

But if you listened to Miss O'Connor O'Neill talking about her blood, her large, broad red face beamed upon



you, and her little, blinking eyes twinkled kindly at you, as they did just now upon a handsome gentleman by her side—Serjeant Stanwell, the notable Q.C.—who was on a visit to his wife's native place.

“Ah, yes; many a story my uncle told. But he was before your time, perhaps?” she queried.

“He was one of the first going judges I ever went on circuit with. He was an old man then,” said Rupert; for it is Rupert Stanwell, who has nearly reached the height of his ambition, although he is yet in the prime of life, and without a silver thread visible in his fair, wavy hair.

“Ye don't say so!” exclaimed Miss O'Connor O'Neill. “And you got your wife from this country, too!” and she looked across the table at two handsome ladies, somewhat apart from each other, both inclining towards *embonpoint*.

“Well, well. I should not have known them, although I remember them well. Pretty—very pretty girls they were.”

It was Elsie and Mabel Mervyne at whom she looked, both grown into matronly ladies, and, as she said, almost beyond recognition.

“Wasn't it a minister the elder one married?” she asked.

“Yes; he is Dr. Manners now; a little further up on this side,” and he indicated the gentleman of whom she asked. “One of the best thought-of men in his Church. He has had bestowed upon him every honour the Church can bestow, ending up with Moderator of General Assembly and the D.D. degree. The people say great things of him. They listen to the greatest

men from other countries, and applaud and praise; but say, 'Very fine; very fine, indeed; but not to be compared with our own Dr. Manners for elegance of pulpit eloquence and dignity of bearing.' They declare that if he only preached one sermon, 'The Beautiful City,' that one was enough to make his name live for ever."

"Ah, yes! My uncle, the Judge, thought great things of Co. Down and Co. Antrim men, although he said they had the most dreadful accent he ever heard men speak. It has nearly died out in this part, I think."

Serjeant Stanwell was Scotch a little, although he was not blessed with the accent of which she spoke, but he could not let his brethren be slighted—not even their accent.

"My dear madam," he said, "I think it speaks remarkably well for us, Irish-Scots, that one of the greatest nations in the world has chosen for their President one of us—I mean America."

"*Fág a' bealach!*" she cried, "an' I can tell ye better than that, too." She always broke into Gaelic when excited. "Her Majesty, Queen Victoria, herself, is descended on the maternal side from the Milesian Prince, Cairbre Riada, of Dalriada, otherwise the Route, Co. Antrim. Now, *mo bhuachaill!*" She ended up triumphantly.

Serjeant Stanwell felt quite unfit to cope with this living encyclopedia of history, and murmured to himself the only Irish sentence he was quite sure of at the time: "*Shean bhean bhocht*" (poor old woman).

"Ah, it's many a story my sister Norah could tell ye," she said, with a sigh. "If ye were at the Friary,



many a story; your wife could put them into her books, to be sure. Ye must come and bring her with you, and Norah shall show the Friary, and tell ye all about it."

Serjeant Stanwell regretted that they took their leave next day. Miss O'Connor O'Neill remembered her luncheon, and busied herself with it for a minute in silence. Miss Norah sat on the other side of the table, an exact reproduction of her sister, except that she was quite silent, with only a word now and then, in answer, when addressed. On the other hand, when she was at home, she talked incessantly, told all the stories, carried on all the conversation; while Miss O'Connor O'Neill preserved a strict silence, kept a bridle upon her tongue, which she took off when going into public, and seemingly laid upon her sister until their return home.

Miss Sylvia Manfield enjoyed for once the attentions of a titled gentleman—that is, he weariedly stoned olives for himself, while Sylvia, indolently, disposed of rather large quantities of sweets. You would not have known the quantities were large if you had not noticed particularly. Sylvia's movements were so *nonchalant*; yet there was a precision and constancy that had the effect of a continuous water drop upon stone.

The Right Honourable Tom Hamilton Mageniss Russell was a little *blasé*, very highly connected, utterly impecunious, and out-at-elbows, rather handsome in an oldish, sallow-skinned, pale-haired, fatigued way. He never did anything in his life, and never intended to do anything, except marry money, if he could get it, which he ran a great chance of doing several times, but lived

in the meantime principally on the soft-hearted Countess of Joscelin, his relative (a cousin in some remote degree), borrowed off her bank-notes, varying from fives to forties—oftener fives, because that good lady knew the Hon. Tom, and knew forty would take no longer time to get rid of than five in his sieve-like hands—only give him a chance of laying a higher stake, and raise false hopes, which was a very wrong thing to do. Now and then those fives brought him a fifty, or a hundred—sometimes two or three hundred. Then the Hon. Tom was enabled to recover some of his jewellery, which had been in safe keeping; and even his well-cut coat, which had not yet cost him anything, except anxiety and a little trouble, had been known to be in the same safe keeping, deposited there by his valet, who very naturally desired to get some wages occasionally, although, as a rule, his wages consisted of tips in other houses than his master's, and a little hand now and then at the roulette table, like his master.

The Hon. Tom did not like sweets; they spoiled his digestion; olives were good for it. Sylvia did not like olives, but loved sweets; therefore each ate after their own liking.

Sylvia had not had many chances of laying siege to titled hearts, so, of course, she made the best of her chances; but there was no reason why she should neglect other things of equal interest, at the same time. Her heavy, white lids, which were seldom lifted, flickered occasionally towards Noël Chester and Grace. Spoonfuls of kickshaws disappeared invisibly from where they had been, and she murmured, with as much aristocratic indolence as the Hon. Tom could



assume for his life, soft *somethings* about cotton and coin; talked about wealthy Manchester merchants, and deigned not to mention any sum less than millions. The effect was quite marvellous.

The Hon. Tom had not thought any person at the Rectory worthy the exertion of being entertained by him; but as Sylvia's soft voice kept up its low murmur, he slowly sat up straighter in his chair, opened a little wider his weary, dull eyes. A little gleam of interest shone in them, and he looked at her. It was a great deal for Tom.

Sylvia might not have felt complimented if she could have read the exact form of his thoughts. He had a horsy tendency, and used stable adjectives to express himself mentally. The result was all Sylvia looked to; and the result was, the Hon. Tom was mightily interested. He noted the valuable rings that adorned her large, well-formed, white hands, every finger laden, and thought, with a sigh, of his own, which were not upon his fingers. Diamond bracelets, rich clothing, handsome figure, pink and white complexion, and the masses of yellow hair, piled up in thousands of little rings of pure gold—the latest Parisian coiffure,—all this, combined with *millions* (he understood from her father was a millionaire, and she his sole heiress), he considered she was fit to be a duchess. And when Jimmy presented a dish of immense strawberries before her, the Hon. Tom actually exerted himself to help her plentifully; and when she said she liked two spoonfuls of whipped cream, he thought it only charming, because of the golden light which surrounded her in his mind, and helped himself to some, of which he ate two-and-a-

half, and rolled about the other three-and-a-half amongst the cream. It was wiser, he remembered, to eat olives than strawberries and cream.

Before Sylvia had got him to this glow of enthusiasm, she had had time to keep an eye upon Noël Chester and Grace. Although she had hinted things in the most ingenious manner, opened glittering vistas for the Hon. Tom to gaze down enviously, yet Noël Chester had been the one aim and object of her life. She had played with dozens of suitors to tempt him to jealousy; but Noël had been quite careless, and he had thought—if he ever really formed a definite thought upon the subject—that it was Sylvia's way of amusing herself: women liked it. He supposed men must like it, too, or they would not be there; he did not trouble himself to go deep into such matters. He had never been in love with her, or made love to her. Their fathers seemed to take it for granted, and considered that a marriage between the two houses would establish them beyond fear of ever becoming pregnable.

Sylvia agreed with them, for not exactly the same reasons, but for reasons of her own. Noël had tacitly agreed, although he had never talked the matter over; he imagined that it might end so some day, and had not troubled to think when that some day might be. Sylvia was very handsome, but not the kind of girl he had affected long ago when a boy; but men's tastes differ from boys. He was thirty now, and had for several years been laughing at such sentimental trash as love. It was only the namby-pamby bosh of silly girls, school-boys, or poets. Sensible men did not go off into raving passions like lunatics; they married



a sensible girl like themselves, for sensible reasons, and had a mild kind of regard for the lady that was likely to last, and not float off like soap bubbles, brilliant and beautiful, but as transient as a breath. "Oh, certainly; why not Sylvia as well as another?" although sometimes he had seen other girls he fancied was a little more to his liking. But, then, the pater wanted Sylvia, and he had enough regard for Sylvia to make him say lazily to the tip of his cigar, as he looked at it, with clouds of blue smoke floating round his head: "Perhaps some day," and dismissed the botheration and the vague feeling of dissatisfaction the contemplation of it always brought.

Sylvia, although she toyed with the Hon. Tom's feelings and weaknesses, had not the least notion of letting Noël slip through her fingers. She had discovered a change in him after that visit to Ireland at Christmas. She had not known the cause; but she now felt that she had lighted upon it. Rage filled her. She could have slapped the Hon. Tom's sallow cheeks into colour, as he graciously bent his small head, with its fine drab-coloured hair parted down the middle (a much too-wide parting) towards her, and slapped the colour out of that little chit of an Irish girl's face, boxed Noël's ears, and ordered him back to her side like a refractory school-boy. Her teeth closed down with a vicious crunch upon a piece of *maringue* she is eating, and the confection sends a great ache through one of them, and makes her nearly forget to smile in answer to the Hon. Tom, who is regaling himself upon another olive, and begged her to have one.

He did not see that gleam in her sleepy eyes as they

glance towards those other two, just like a pussy cat pretending to sleep, but with a savage hunger all the while for the poor, little bird in its cage. While she smiles, she vows mentally that she shall see about it.

Meanwhile, Grace does not think of Sylvia at all, but listens to the voice beside her, and, unconsciously, yields to the look in the eyes bent upon her. A happiness, pure and tender, such as she has never felt before, fills her soul, and the two, forgetful that there is any one present but themselves, gaze into one another's eyes and find therein deep joy.

Noël felt another man—it was neither “perhaps,” nor “some day” with him now. He had altogether forgotten about silly school-boys, love-sick girls, or sentimental poets. He knew nothing about being cool, or calm, or sensible, or manly, or cynical. He even forgot his luncheon, and dreamt only of nectar. He was as passionate and impulsive as if he were a freshman going to his first ball, in his first suit of evening dress, with his heart thumping behind his white shirt, half with fright, half with love, for his hostess' pretty daughter.

Noël thought it all past ten years ago, because he had never felt it. Strange to say, it had a singular effect upon him; when he was not gazing into Grace's eyes, or watching the contrast between her white teeth and red lips, he had a strong desire to disparage everybody else. He could see no beauty that was not in Grace; she alone was the acme of everything most desirable. Sylvia was fat and washed out, in his opinion, and ate a great deal too much; that old lady across the table both gobbled and gabbled; another was a whipping-



post; even the Countess was coarse. Nothing pleased him, nothing but Grace. His eyes returned to her with a more passionate light; his lips whispered softer and sweeter words, and he bent towards her as if she were the light of his eyes and the joy of his heart. The cunning little blind god, who had on that bygone Christmas eve fingered a dart by its feathery part, and bent his bow with malicious intent ere he implanted with unerring aim the germ of love in both their hearts, hugged himself with delight when he saw his seedling not only budding, but blooming a rich and splendid harvest. He chuckled and fluttered his gauzy little wings, stretched out his chubby little legs, and flew away in pursuit of his calling, with his bow strung and a dart fixed ready for execution upon the hearts of the guileless.

All this time there was the least little bit of a misgiving in the good Rector's heart, and ever and anon his mind strayed towards it, as the point of the needle turns towards the loadstone.

That morning, when Grace's roses arrived, and he stood watching them being arranged, he was struck by the perfection of her cloth-of-gold rose. He himself had one of these, and, as he had fancied at the time, incomparable; but as he looked from one to the other he imagined Grace's was finer. The more he looked the more he was impressed. The charms of hers became enhanced; his own lessened. Hers grew and grew; his diminished and diminished. Still he compared; still every unusual depth of shade in Grace's increased its beauty, and still the more delicate tints of his own paled in his eyes. Secretly, for not to a soul did he

breathe it, he chafed and fumed. His best rose outshone ! his best rose beaten ! and by a bud planted by his own hand, too, from the very same parent tree. Had the garden at the Cross-roads more sun ? Was it warmer, or had it a pleasanter breeze ? Were his sheltering hedges too thick, or were they not thick enough ? He must have them attended to at once. Williams, the gardener, must have been negligent, and he himself had not thought of it ; he must see to it immediately. All the roses of the Show could not compensate for this one supposed flaw in his favourite rose. He had varieties of every class—Bourbons, Noisettes, Tea-scented Chinas, Perpetuals, and hybrids of each kind—a multitude of varieties ; and varied and exquisite were some of those sent in by other exhibitors. Every conceivable shade of colour was there, from the silvery blush of *coupe d'Hebé*, or the sweet Provence, to the darkest violet and purple crimson of Pierre Notting or Charles Lefebvre—globular, conical, cupped, expanded, convex, concave. What cared he what form, what colour, or class was there if his dearest treasure, the beauteous cloth-of-gold, was not perfect.

The poor Rector's heart was sorely tried, sadly vexed, within him. Yet he cleared his throat handsomely, and chatted pleasantly and musically all through luncheon to the Countess, explained to her all about roses, the growing of them, the cutting of them, and the showing of them, all the while with this nightmare upon him. Goodness ! Does one ever know what lies behind a waistcoat ? Not a soul at the good man's table suspected or even thought of him or his trials, for one and



all had trials and perplexities of their own ; and not the least amongst them was Freda's. Her feelings over her first public entertainment beggared description ; she was lost in a maze—part delight, part terror. She had got the prettiest frock imaginable—the very first one she declared that was not a horror of ugliness ; and up to within five minutes of the luncheon she had been in a whirl of pleasure and excitement, and if she had her will, could have hopped about like a bird and hugged herself with happiness. Only demure behaviour was absolutely necessary to a proper care of her dainty garments. What was her astonishment when she saw Mrs. Ford-Barron and Squire Aylesbury bearing down upon her, evidently bent upon seizing her young person and bearing her off.

Mrs. Ford-Barron had felt that an apology was due to the Squire when she found herself reduced to offering him Freda as a companion ; but it died away upon her lips when she saw with what alacrity that gentleman ceded to what she would have considered an infliction for him. The good lady was somewhat astonished, and could hardly help looking it. But Freda—who knew all the ghost, goblin, and fairy tales of the neighbourhood, every particle of folk-lore there was to be known—her eyes grew round with terror, and rested upon him with a fascinated gaze ; she never thought of appealing to her sister or begging off. Her hand was taken—she did not give it—and placed within the Squire's arm, and his beautiful, bewitching voice was brought into play. He helped her to everything of the daintiest, and talked to her in a way that would have won the heart of a sphinx. Freda's limpid blue eyes

remained fixed upon him in wonder and fright, as a helpless bird gazes upon the snake. She thought of the old Squire, and the young Squire, and the black-browed keeper; she thought of the church gate and of Watson. She looked at the Squire's handsome, cold, aristocratic face, bent upon her smilingly. She looked at his thin, muscular hands; she looked at the signet ring upon the little finger nearest her; she looked round all the faces at table; she looked at the tall lilies and the little ones; she looked into the dishes and into her plate. She pulled her napkin into a rope; she looked at Jimmy, the maid, and even the oil-paintings upon the walls. She was bewildered, perhaps enchanted. She thought not, her mind was chaos; and her eyes returned to the Squire's face and remained there.

He thought her a charming little creature; indeed, he had begun to think so some time before when he had seen her careering along upon her pony. And now bright visions of a youthful bride rose up before him; thoughts of forming her innocent mind, and moulding her ductile will—training up a wife exactly after his own heart.

He was pleased for the first time in his life that he had never married. He should do so now; and what more charming wife than the Rector's little half-sister. Money was no consideration; he was wealthy. He looked at her flossy hair hanging about her shoulders, her rose-leaf skin, her tapering fingers, and said to himself that he could mould her into exactly the kind of wife that suited and pleased him best. She looked back at him with wide eyes, and her old fearful



thoughts passed before her in slow succession for the third time, still winding up with the refrain: "He walks up and down the stair-case every night, up and down, up and down, up and down." She shivered. Was it from her thoughts or from the effects of an ice he had placed upon her plate in the form of a snowball, and of which she had unwittingly eaten too large a part? She could not have told. She might have said the former; perhaps it was the latter. But when she got away from his fascinating eyes, out into the sunshine amongst the roses, she felt free and happy again, and flitted about amongst everybody, like a butterfly—another sweet creation of the glory of summer.

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## CHAPTER XII.

SARAH ANN AND THE VEXATA QUÆSTIO, DRESS.—AT THE SHOW  
AND FETE.—SARAH ANN AS A COUNTY DOWN CAMILLA.—  
SPORTS AND RECREATION OF THE DAY.—WEARINESS COMES  
ON THE WINGS OF NIGHT.

**G**AIETY was the order of the day. The farmers' wives donned their fresh new summer bonnets, opened their many-coloured parasols, struggled into tight gloves, wreathed their comely faces in sunshiny smiles, and went to the Rectory. The farmers themselves were brushed, and scrubbed, and polished by their good ladies; dressed in their finest and whitest shirts, which were as a rule reserved for Sundays; choked up in the stiffest of stiff collars and cravats, their boots polished so that any one could see themselves in them, their jolly faces as brown as berries with the spring sun when it blazed down upon their heedless heads as they were intent upon sowing the seed which now decked the earth, promising fulness, and fatness, and plenty—a race of men pleasant to look upon; stout, homely, sensible, staid, flourishing, with force and fortitude predominant; good-looking, too, in a robust, healthy, powerful, manly way—a race of men well fitted to be the main-stay and backbone of any nation.

Their wives were *very* genteel, and, as a consequence,



they themselves a good deal finer, and stiffer, and a little more polite, not to say flustered than usual. Their labourers and their wives had undergone nearly as much dressing as their masters and mistresses, and were just as fine, and as proper, and as genteel, and as smiling in their way.

And the children—all the children of the neighbourhood, gentle and simple, from little May Morton, in all the pride of a big Leghorn hat, wreathed round with daisies, a white muslin frock and blue sash, short socks, and patent shoes, to little Jenny Morrison, who was quite as proud of her pink cotton frock, her new boots laced over her little brown hacked feet, that went naked nine months out of the twelve, and were probably far happier in that natural state than they were shod in leather on this fairest of mid-summer days. But Jenny would not for worlds have gone in her bare feet, nor would her mother for worlds have permitted such a thing,—so it was with both pride and satisfaction she viewed her hot feet, and her pretty pink frock, and marched along, carrying her mother's big cotton umbrella, which was three-quarters as tall as herself, with as much dignity as a lady of the land, quite unconscious that her hair, which she supposed to be curling down her back in beautiful ringlets, stuck in two little wisps—one behind each ear, with none at all down her back. It was most natural for Jenny to think she had curls, for had it not been twisted up in soap, and sugar, and papers twenty-four hours before the time it was wanted to come out in the glory of ringlets, as all the other little girls' hair had been in the neighbourhood with much the same result. *Everybody* puts their hair in curls when

they are going any place, don't they? but everybody finds that it is not so easy getting up beautiful ringlets all of a sudden; and the hair of the neighbourhood presented a wonderful sight.

It would have given some new ideas to ladies' barbers if they could have seen it, and certainly might have rise to amazing new coiffeurs, not exactly *à la Parisienne*, but *à la County Down*, which would be a new name, as well as new designs.

But Jenny was nothing to her sister Sarah Ann. There were eleven of the Morrisons, and the elder part of the family were grown-up young ladies, and the dressing, as you may suppose, caused a break in the monotony of their lives. There were veils and frills, and penny roses, and yellow cotton gloves, and white cotton stockings, and pink ribbons, and blue ribbons, and orange ribbons, that would do for the twelfth of July; scarlet ribbons and crimson; things round their necks, and round their sleeves, and round their hats, and round their waists, and round every place it was possible to put anything round. This was what upset poor Sarah Ann. Everybody was so intent upon getting themselves fixed, nobody would help Sarah Ann. She was not grown up, to be sure, but she thought she was; she was twelve, with ideas enough for twenty. Not one would even listen to *her ideas* of dressing herself; she wanted *something* to put round her neck; "*something* to put round my neck." If she said it once, she said it a thousand times a day—sometimes in a wailing tone, sometimes in a jaunty tone. Nobody heard—not one paid the least heed—"Something to put round my neck—something to put round my neck."



At last her mother heard, and asked her what she wanted. She wanted a ribbon.

"What would you do with it, Sarah Ann?"

*"Put it round my neck."*

Well, "constant dropping," you know. Sarah Ann got her ribbon at last, but it was green, and yellow, and blue, and red striped. Sarah Ann's heart was broken—tears fell in a deluge; she wept and wailed, and wailed and wept, and kept up such a howling match that she got her ears boxed. Then she recovered her good spirits, and took to the dressing again.

This time Sarah Ann wanted "a veil, a *veil*, a VEIL." Poor Sarah Ann was far down on the list, and a veil was a hopeless wish, but Sarah Ann was not easily daunted. She knew quite well what to do with it if she had it, and a veil she wanted, and a veil she would have, so she kept up the din like a cornrake, until she was again heard.

"A what?" asked her mother, with uplifted hand, threatening Sarah Ann's ear.

Poor Sarah Ann cowered down, but had the courage to say, "a veil."

"What in the name of goodness would you do with it? A veil——"

Sarah Ann forgot in her fright what she had intended doing with her veil when she got it, and said, *"Put it round my——"*

Down came the suspended hand. Sarah Ann darted forward and escaped "by the skin of her teeth." And thus it was that Sarah Ann had to go to the entertainment with only part of her finery, but she was

none the less proud for all that, and had her ringlets in as well as the rest.

Then the young men and maidens. The young ladies, as you may suppose, didn't go too early; and by the time they had themselves beautifully done up and had gone through all the marquees but one, the crowds had swelled and overflowed the back lawn, out into a fine grass field beyond.

There were hundreds of happy faces. The young gentlemen walked about in rows, or stood in groups laughing and talking about the young ladies; and the young ladies walked about in rows or stood in groups, and laughed and talked about the gentlemen. Some of the finer ones tossed their heads. Some simpered and smiled invitingly; others looked shy and conscious every group of young men they passed, but still they kept passing and repassing.

Stalls of sweetmeats appeared, and with the Rector's permission, began to vend their wares to hundreds of ready purchasers. Barley sugar, all the colours of the rainbow, great sugar-covered cakes, and sugar-of-hail cakes, fizzing lemonade and baskets of gooseberries, a trifle green as yet, but none the less palatable, as the little boys soon showed.

Then, after a great deal of hesitation and indecision, as to whether they should do what they had come for no other purpose than to do, the gentlemen groups broke up, and mingled with the young lady groups; and after a great deal more hesitation and embarrassment on both sides, invited them to go for refreshments to the marquee, into which the young ladies had not gone at first.



The farmers, sons and daughters ate extremely thin sandwiches, and drank extremely tiny cups of tea inside. The servant boys and girls ate sugar-of-hail cakes, and drank biting lemonade outside. The little boys ate green gooseberries and sugar cakes ravenously. The little girls ate red and pink and green barley-sugar till they grew qualmish, and their cheeks and fingers sticky, and things went along swimmingly.

Then some pushing spirits got up rings, and everybody ran until they were so hot and so delighted. All the young men raced away temptingly from all the nicest young ladies, and all the young ladies ran away to be caught by all the nicest young gentlemen. Then some of them broke away from the rings to walk about in twos. They walked about everywhere, and went past everybody, going no place in particular.

The fathers and mothers and younger children stood and smiled on approvingly. The mothers especially smiled as their grown-up daughters went past with their cavaliers. Rows of people lined the sides of the field.

The Rector went out and in amongst everybody, as if he had taken leave of his senses, and meant to be a schoolboy again, so that all his young people might take example from him, and feel at liberty to amuse themselves.

The Countess of Joscelin and the Archdeacon and all the other guests walked about for an hour amongst the others. Mrs. Ford-Barron chatted to the farmers' wives, and was as agreeable as it was possible for a little lady to be.

Noël Chester talked with the Mortons all the afternoon, keeping on one side of Grace, Freda hanging

upon her other arm. Squire Aylesbury and the Hon. Tom evidently vieing for Miss Manfield's favours.

The afternoon was so hot, and everybody amused themselves so, one would have thought the gods had come down to earth, and there was no such things as jealousies or envyings or heartburnings. Nobody *could* have thought that anybody's sweetheart was walking with some one else, or that it was possible that anyone in the place had no sweetheart at all. One would verily have believed everything went just as everybody really wanted it to go—without a hitch; without a flaw.

Then all the grand people went away, after standing about under their sunshades on the lawn, taking tiny wafers and little cups of rich cream with a dash of tea in it, which Mrs. Ford-Barron called "tea." The Countess left with a bouquet of choicest roses, and the Hon. Tom in her train.

Miss O'Connor O'Neill and her sister were settling themselves in their carriage, when she cried out to Grace :

"Oh, my dear child, we want you to come and spend a week with us at The Friary. My sister, Norah, is dying to hear how you are getting along with your point lace, so come and enliven us up a little. Mrs. Morton, like a good creature, let us have her for a week, and we shall love you for ever."

"Oh, my dear Miss O'Connor O'Neill, we all want to come," cries Mrs. Ford-Barron, "some afternoon. We have heard so much of the treasures of The Friary—its curiosities and legends—that we are longing to see and hear them. May I bring my visitors over one afternoon?"



"May you! My dear creature," said the delighted lady, "Norah will only be too happy to show you everything, and tell you all about them. What afternoon, then? Will Friday do, think ye?"

She could not have been better pleased if Mrs. Ford-Barron had made her a valuable present, for, of all things, she loved best to see visitors, and to see her sister, Norah, showing the curiosities, and hear her telling the legends of their home.

"Friday," said Mrs. Ford-Barron, and she put her finger to her lip to help her to reflect. "Ah!—Friday. Oh, yes—Friday, of course, will do beautifully, if it will suit you?"

"We shall be charmed, then. So come early, and bring that pretty *páistín fionn*" (fair-haired child-teen), pointing to Freda, "with you. And you, Grace, *ma mhúirín* (mavourneen), as your sister does not object, come soon—to-morrow evening or next morning—which shall it be?"

Grace having promised to go on the following evening, she waved her hand in farewell to them all, saying:

"Drive on, Shamus. *Deagh trátnóna*; *deagh trátnóna*" (good evening).

When Miss O'Connor O'Neill spoke Irish, Freda wickedly spoke French, so that neither was very sure of what the other was saying, but they guessed, having many opportunities of hearing each other. So Freda answered her, "*Bon soir, Madame, bon soir*," rising on her toes, and shaking her fussy hair at her.

Miss O'Connor O'Neill shook her finger reprovingly at her, and smilingly the two old ladies rolled away

in their shabby phaeton, with its two large heavy horses. The good ladies had seen better days and better horses, but they were very happy in their present possessions.

Miss Sylvia beguiled the Squire into staying another hour, and as games for the children were now in full swing, she walked round looking at them, and even distributing the prizes at the Rector's request to the winners. The Squire was so pleased that he added a few half-crowns to the prizes, and everyone thought Sylvia (herself included) had made a conquest of the Squire.

There were purses and pocket-knives for the boys' races; belts, and beads, and dolls for the girls' races. Sarah Ann took off her boots to enable her to exercise her muscles better, and was made happy as the winner of a bright-blue leather belt. She had won a doll with her boots on some time before, and, flushed with success, she meant to achieve still greater things. "Persevere" was her unwritten law, and perseverance was stamped upon her every action. The boys and girls competed separately; but there was a certain pretty red-leather purse filled with glassy marbles, which Sarah Ann's eyes rested upon; and, resting, sent forth scintillating gleams of covetousness. Sarah Ann put on her spurs—otherwise, she took off her boots and stockings, and ranged herself in line with a row of five boys, every one a head taller than herself. She would have headed the list, so great was her faith in her own powers, or her cunning to obtain the best starting-point, only the first three boys having quite as great an itching in their palms for possession of the prize as Sarah Ann, had thrust her down below them. Even then she was not daunted. She stood, right foot



out, her small hands clenched tight, moistening her lips with the sharpest, pinkest, swiftest, and longest tongue imaginable, her eyes steadfastly fixed upon the Rector, awaiting the word of command. But some one saw Sarah Ann was not exactly a boy, and the poor creature was ignominiously expelled from the ranks.

But "a light heart lives long." Sarah Ann acknowledged no such word as beaten; or, if she had to admit it sometimes, she did not think beaten once was beaten for ever; and at the sight of a bright, new half-crown, which looked fresh from the mint, every crinkle upon its edge perfect, and the many hands of time and change not yet having tampered with Her Majesty's benign countenance, the demon, Desire, once more sprung to life in Sarah Ann's gentle bosom.

"Persevere, Sarah Ann, persevere." Noël Chester, having observed the poor little soul's discomfited and crestfallen appearance, thought she deserved another chance, so when the boys' race was over, he gave the new half-crown to the Rector as a prize for the senior girls.

Sarah Ann stood first in line this time, rest assured, indomitable courage in every feature and limb, as if she meant to have the prize. She also faithfully intended to work for it, to win it, or die in the attempt. There was no more flesh on her little body than on a crow. Her legs were made for racing—slender and long; the hair that had been put in curl the day before, had behaved freakishly, one-half in three tight curls yet, the other half in lank, unsightly, elfish locks; and the ribbon that she had such trouble getting, had worked itself round, until the bow appeared between the curls and the lank hair behind. But what cared she? Her

mind dwelt not on past grievances, but on glories to come. Her eyes well nigh started from their sockets as they strained from the Rector, with the prize held up in his finger and thumb, to the man standing with the pole, round which they all had to run.

Fifty times Sarah Ann measured the distance by a rapid glance—fifty times her little fists closed tighter, and her pink tongue went round her red, thin lips, like a greyhound on the scent, as she waited for the signal.

“One,” said the Rector, in a loud voice. “Two.”

Away went Sarah Ann.

“Come back, come back, come back, Sarah Ann,” cried a dozen voices. Sarah Ann stood in line again.

“One,” said the Rector. She looked in his face, trembling. “Two.” Every nerve strained and quivered. “Three.” Every girl of the line was gone before Sarah Ann; yet something within her whispered, “Persevere, Sarah Ann; persevere.”

The man with the pole came nearer; some of the girls grew frightened that they might be left behind, and did not go round him. But Sarah Ann cleared him with a wide sweep, passed two girls—one that had gone round him, and one that had not. Three were before her still, and the goal was growing nearer. She passed one more, and began to get abreast of the next one—the one in front had not rounded the man with the pole. A hundred voices cried: “Come on, Sarah Ann; come on; you girl, come on!”

On raced Sarah Ann, one side of her lank hair streaming, her cotton frock above her knees, her elbows playing the fiddle, and amidst loud cheers Sarah Ann



came in an easy first, and sprang a yard high at the prize half-crown held up in the Rector's hand.

Then boys tried to walk in sacks, and tied together in pairs. They continually fell and rolled over each other, and could not get up again until they were lifted. The fun was great, and the progress very trifling. There was football away in the further corner of the field; and everybody walked about mostly in twos, sometimes in threes, defying the old proverb, and oftentimes in fours, just as the fancy led them.

Hamilton came out, with the cook and housemaid on either side of him. Watson made his appearance with Minnie and Rosey on either side of him. The two trios met. Rosey looked at Hamilton, and tossed her head; the new cook looked at Rosey, and tossed her head; the housemaid looked at them all, and tossed her head. Hamilton felt the least little bit uncomfortable: three ladies, you know, *are* difficult, especially when inclined to bickering. The only way of counteracting the effect is by growing cross and quarrelsome yourself—take the jockey-word of them, as it were.

But Hamilton was not driven to such extremes. Fortunately, his old friend of the R.I.C., Mr. Peeler, was airing himself around in company with one of his brethren; and neither the new cook nor the housemaid being so strait-laced as Mrs. Battle used to be, they were in no wise adverse to an evening airing, or an hour or two's idling. So Hamilton was quite free to look after Rosey, the disdainful, which he forthwith proceeded to do.

The sun had set, and the shadows grew. Those weary with pleasure began to wend homewards, and the good Rector's voice was heard calling for cheers in

honour of EVERYBODY that had in any way assisted in the day's amusement. Evidently, his mind was at rest, and no clouds rested upon his good heart; for had not he, like Sarah Ann, won first prize—first of first—for best specimen of finest and most delicate roses presented that day in open contest at the Show. His fears of the morning had been dispersed in a whiff, like a tiny cloudlet, blown away like filmy cobwebs, puffed away, and forgotten like a thing that had never existed, and which never did exist except in his own over-anxious brain. His astonishment had been unbounded, when, on going round the chief marquee with his lady guests, to find “first prize” laid neatly under that vexatious rose of his which in the morning hours had seemed to play him false after all his devotion. But it was only in seeming, so that the success and honour it brought him might thereby be enhanced.

First prize upon his cloth-of-gold! Oh, no! They certainly must be wrong! or had they wished to gratify him? Yet how could they know? Had not he been at special pains to let none know to whom the roses belonged until after the prizes had been awarded? Oh, no! they could not know, and yet there was Grace's rose as perfect as ever, kissing the damp-laden moss, daintily feeding its freshness upon it. Which was the best—the one the judges thought best, or the one he himself thought best? He gazed, and his mind wavered between conviction of his sight and desire of the heart.

Grace's rose was beautiful by all means, but not enough expanded to be the correct exhibition-rose. The Rector having had more experience, had cut his at the most approved stage, and it was only that hideous



phantom—nervous fear—that had worked such havoc, that had ever raised trembling doubt in the good man's heart. It is only those who have been upon the rack of doubt who appreciate the pleasure of knowing their fears have been groundless, or know the palpitating joy the Rector felt over a little square of pasteboard with the two monosyllables engraven thereon.

As for Grace, what cared she for such vanities and vexations? There was no room for such in her beating heart—only a trembling, tumultuous joy reigned there. The only prize for which she cared smiled at her from Noël's eyes all the afternoon when they chanced to meet her own; and as he walked by her side back to the Cross-roads, promising himself a visit there to renew his acquaintance with them all, at Mrs. Morton's invitation; the bars of crimson and gold in the west sank into ruby, rose, opaline, silver, and amethystine, deep and purple, and the milky way sparkled with diamonds like immortal eyes peeping at mortal things below; soft, shadowy, grey mists rose from the rivers, phantom-like things reaching up towards heaven, like to aspiring souls.

The earth and the fruits and flowers thereof exhaled, and the soft dews fell upon the land; the teal and wild drake whistled past, the curlews cried, the landrail croaked her monotonous lay amongst the hay, and the heron screamed as he rose up from amongst the marshes and rushes; the night bats flew, and silvery heart-faced owls flashed on their way. Things of night were prowling and things of day were sleeping. Half the world rested while the other half——. Ah, well! we shall say, perhaps they were playing; and, if they were not, we can but wish they were. *Ἀναμν βοῶν.*

## CHAPTER XIII.

THE FRIARY.—LEGEND OF THE IRISH HARP.—WHEN HEARTS  
ARE YOUNG.—MISS O'CONNOR O'NEILL WAKES THE ECHOES.

**S**OFT and dreamy was the balmy air of the golden mid-summer day, bathed in sunshine with the softest of zephyr breezes, caressing the starry jasmine, and rustling amongst the glossy ivy leaves clinging to its ancient walls, the Friary reposed, like a hoary warrior, weary from many battles, enjoying a well-earned rest; its grey-stone walls mouldering away in the hands of busy time; its heavy-browed, low, broad, iron-studded, oaken doors, and heavy mullioned windows breathing of siege, of days of bloodshed, rapacious invasions, pillage, and wholesale slaughter that had swept from shore to shore, devastating, plundering, and laying waste the fair land of this our Emerald Isle—the gem of the ocean. With the fierce frown of defiance with which it once sternly withstood the marauders—still contracting and making more grim its gloomy brow—it continues to frown on friend and foe alike, as some creature who, having witnessed a horrible deed, evermore carries terror that nought will obliterate, stamped in their distended, dilating eyes: so the façade of the old Friary carried traces of grim sights and black deeds, and, if it could have spoken, would have voiced fearful tales of the awful things that go to make up the history of the Irish nation.



But stones do not literally speak ; they 'carry their tales locked up within them till the last grains of sand fall asunder, and are swept away into oblivion ; and the most sibylline gifted cannot, without the aid of a rosetta-stone, wring their secrets from them. They can only deal in that vaguest and most delusive of all words, "probably," which amounts to real assertions based upon shadowy foundations ; and shadows *will* flicker and waver, and pass away, and leave us without any foundations at all. *Hélas !*

But the smiling lawns, studded with a few handsome oaks—for the park was reduced, and grew smaller year after year, as the fortunes of the family waned ; and milch cows could now be seen beyond the wire fence, browsing, where once the fallow-deer cropped the green herbage, or frisked in the glades of the shady wood. But the woods and deer have alike disappeared ; and only half-a-dozen acres surround the old pile, sweeten with verdure, and waving trees whispering sweet music, what would otherwise be only a grim *relique* of ancient days.

In the beginning of the eighteenth century, the old Friary was occupied by a company of Franciscan Friars, of whose location there the pretty legend is told : " While the Friars were praying at Rome, a vision of a lady in white appeared unto them, warning them to go and build a Friary in Ireland in the place where they should hear the sound of three bells ringing. So having travelled over the length and breadth of Ireland, and not yet having heard the promised sign, and being weary and footsore, they sat themselves down to rest at an old castle-gate. While resting, their hearts were

gladdened by the faint, sweet sound of a chime, which gradually swelled and surged down the valleys and through the woods, from the beautiful but lonely hillsides of County Down." So there they built their *Locus Refugii*—the Friary in the *Coyle* (the wood).

After many years, when they had removed to their new monastery, and the *Refugii* was a ruin, the O'Neills rebuilt it in memory of one of their ancestors, who had been one of the last friars who inhabited it—Anthony O'Neill,—and the Friary is undermined with a network of little stone cells and subterranean passages, and narrow, spiral stone stairs, whose steps and flags are trodden into hollows with the incessant penitential tread of monkish feet. The walls are built of the old material upon almost the same plan, and on the old site; and the little, low, heavy oaken doors, studded with nails, clang and echo in the same mysterious way they did a couple of centuries ago. And in the twilight, one glancing over their shoulders hastily, could almost imagine they see silent, grey-robed figures flitting down the long passages, and disappearing through low doors, with cowed heads and naked feet—phantoms of the past come back to revisit the scenes of their earthly habitation.

And when the wind wails upon wild nights it bears upon its wings soft, surging sounds, like the echo of chanting voices, giving back—who can say?—Rosicrucian whispers from the past; and if only we knew their language, we might know the tales the walls could tell.

But the old Friary is very much domesticised; and what was once the refectory is now Miss Norah's drawing-room, filled to overflowing with a heterogeneous



collection of *curios* from many countries and climes, redolent of sandal-wood and tropical scents and sweet spices.

The front door stands wide open, and the sunshine falls in flakes upon the parquet-flooring of the entrance hall, and brightens the cloisteral dimness and quiet of its domed interior. Two flights of shallow, black marble stairs reach up to the encircling balconies or galleries, which are laden with the overflowings of curiosities from the drawing-rooms.

Many of the family have been wanderers, and few of them ever returned without treasure-trove from the East and West, from the North and South. Dainty little cabinets of rare wood, fragile china and Venetian glass, curious little cups of green jade, and vases of jasper and caskets of filigreed gold and silver. Delightful carvings and elegantly formed things in marble and ivory, wood and stone, with elaborately executed, intricate tracery of tropical animals, fishes, birds, fruits, foliage, and flowers. Gold-embroidered peacocks and pig-tailed busts from Celestia. Statuettes of bejewelled, almond-eyed, bronze beauties and turbaned Moors from the East, who looked as if they were always engaged in intrigues and treachery and plots and schemes; with their richly-robed figures and sandalled, silent feet; with their great beards, brown faces, and black eyes; with the wealth and power of the world at their command, and the silent cunning and craft of devils in their hearts.

Ah, yes!—that is how they look to unaccustomed eyes, but who knows if they are more crafty or more wicked than smooth-tongued, cruel-hearted, deceitful,

cunning pale-faces ? *They* are not all dead, you know, or, if we say they are, 'tis only like the toadies Thackeray talked about—they are, unfortunately, hale and hearty when the joke is over.

Then there were snakes and birds and small animals in cases, and shells and flints and spear-heads and quoits and minerals beyond telling; laces and embroideries and tapestries. An ancient embroidery frame, an old spinning-wheel, and above all, an old Irish harp. Things that it would have taken weeks to see, months to examine, and years to hear the legends of; for although the two good old ladies' income had dwindled down to three figures, and not high up in the numerals at that, money never, and love seldom, induced them to part with any of their treasures. So if the walls and the stones thereof had tales to tell of home, legion was the number that might be told of the things hidden away in the chambers and galleries of the whilom Friary.

It was no wonder that Miss O'Connor O'Neill invited every one upon whom she could prevail to come and visit the Friary; and it was still less wonder that Miss Norah had a great deal of talking to do when they did come, and did not waste her voice in public, for every little story and legend connected with the whole collection had a clear and definite place in the cells of her memory, like unbroken rows of books in a library. If she had lived in those days she might have contested for victory in the battle of words of the women of Ulster, only there was nothing Xantippic about her. Her voice was soft and gentle, and she talked in a sprightly, fresh, interesting, little, gushing



flow of chatter. She was the pet and darling of her sister from her childhood, and continued in the same office ever since. She did only the prettiest and most dainty little things, and, if anything was not so pretty or so nice to do, Miss O'Connor O'Neill took that upon herself, and left the others to Norah. She could make the loveliest wax flowers and fruit—fruit that would tempt one as much as the apple of Eden tempted Eve. She could make cakes and confections which compared with the productions of steam bakeries—tasted and smelled like ambrosia itself; and she could work point lace that rivalled the choicest specimens her cabinets contained—lace like spider-webs, fit for duchesses to wear. And in all these things Grace Wardwood was her pupil.

The door stood wide open, and the jasmine peeped round the porch, throwing quivering tracery upon the sun-flaked floor.

Miss O'Connor O'Neill poured tea out from a little fat-looking, broad Queen Anne silver teapot. Miss Norah cut slices of nuns' cake with a slender stiletto, which had a curiously wrought heavy silver handle, all suggesting Spanish vengeance, and vendettas, and such like wickedness, but which had never done execution upon anything more formidable than nuns' cakes since it left the cutler's shop.

The guests sat in wonderfully distorted and twisted chairs, sipped tea from Sévres china, and ate peaches from a dish that ought to have been in the British Museum.

Miss Norah chatted; her sister sat silent. Mrs. Ford-Barron listened. Noël Chester looked at Grace,

and Grace looked back again. Miss Sylvia observed them through her languid eyelids, and Freda reclined upon an improvised divan of cushions, patted the head of a tiger-skin under her feet, put her fingers into its glassy eyes, shook hands with it as if it were a living dog, or something of the sort, and she, a baby; ate peaches and nuns' cake alternately; and rolled luxuriously upon her divan, with the sunshine just touching her yellow gold hair.

"You will show us the harp, Miss Norah, *ma cher*, won't you?" said Freda, who had seen it dozens of times before, but wished to introduce to the uninitiated the chief and most interesting sights first. "*Mais ma sœur* has not finished tea yet, nor Sylvia her peaches, so just tell us the story before we go to see it."

Miss Norah said, "Certainly, my dear," and smiled upon her, and her sister nodded at Freda with approval, as if she would say, "You will do, *mavourneen*. You will soon be very good. In a few years you will know all there is to know, and make a capital guide, *Una millis*."

Freda felt she would. She had a feeling she knew nearly enough about the curiosities and the Friary itself to play the part of Cicerone with dignity and eloquence second only to Miss Norah herself, and she had just a shade of difficulty in restraining her glib little tongue from anticipating Miss Norah's best stories,—not that Miss Norah would have minded much, for they spoiled and indulged Freda to the top of her bent. Her only reproof would have been an indulgent smile and a soft little pat on the cheek.

But Freda had a tender little heart, and would not



for worlds have vexed her dear friends; so she made heroic efforts, and kept her mouth screwed up tight lest her tongue should run away with her unawares, if she thought Miss Norah was long of getting to the point; and it was only by judicious queries (which, as everybody knows, is quite a boon to the story-teller, when put at the right time, and in the proper place, and brings out the flavour and colouring to amazing advantage), Freda allowed herself to assist in the narrations.

“Now, Noël, do you hear? a real Irish harp?” she cried.

“A real one, Miss Norah?” asked Noël.

“A real Irish harp, Mr. Chester, supposed to have come from the *Lios* of an Irish king. Long after the *Lios* had been destroyed, the harp, with many other valuables, was found amongst the ruins of the chapel belonging to it—where they were supposed to have been hidden away from the marauders—but they had lain hidden so long that they were nearly completely destroyed. A descendant of the owners of the *Lios* gave the harp to my great-great-grandfather when she was a blushing maiden, and he a young man who scarcely knew which he admired most—dimpling cheeks and sparkling eyes, or fossilated antiquities. He put in a few strings and played for her, and the music was so wonderfully and so enchantingly sweet, that she begged him to keep it; and when he played upon it to let its tones recall her to him, she told him a legend of how it came by its magical tone. When St. Brigid the Blessed and her sisters were going on a pilgrimage, they sought the hospitality of this king;

but when they arrived, the king himself and his chief retainers, including the harpers, were absent. However, the king's sons did all that reverence and a hospitable spirit could do to suitably receive their honoured guest. After supper, St. Brigid, observing harps upon the walls, begged them to favour her with some of the ancient melodies of the country.

“‘Alas! honoured lady,’ said the eldest son, ‘neither my brothers nor myself have ever learned the art, and my father and the bards are absent. But, if you will bless our fingers, we will do all we can to gratify you.’

“She touched their fingers with her own, murmuring a prayer. They sat down, and played such sweet, powerful melodies, that never had such music been heard in the halls before. So enthralling was it that they never seemed to tire playing, nor the guests of listening; and when the king and bards returned, they were amazed to hear the unskilled youths producing such music. But when they saw the Saint and her sisters, they no longer marvelled.”

“So that,” said Miss Norah, “is how the harp came by its beautiful tones. But there is one much older than that—of how the Irish harp came to be in the form of a sea nymph; and if Miss Sylvia has done with her peaches, we shall go to the gallery, and Grace shall play the harp for you and sing the song. She has converted the legend into verse—a legend of which, I have heard, my great-great-grandfather unconsciously imitated the hero, and left the maiden to mourn; for the love of antiquities beguiled him away from the fair one so long, that when he returned to seek her, she had consoled herself with Seumair Deaig (Red James), a fiery kins-



man of her own, and had not waited for the stony-hearted antiquarian to come back again."

"Rather cruel of your kinsman, eh, Miss Norah, was it not?" and Noel laughed as he asked it.

"It was not he who was cruel," cried Freda; and she flung three peach stones in succession at Miss O'Connor O'Neill's tabby, as it dozed upon the door-step in the sun, not one of which reached its intended victim. "At least he was only a wee bit cruel at first, but it was she who ought to have been faithful until he returned. She ought not to have married Seumas Deasys, the horrid, red, wicked, fighting monster; she ought to have waited for her lover to come back. All nice girls do, you know."

"Freda knows all about it evidently," drawled Sylvia, with a slight sneer, which piqued Freda's pride.

Sylvia took a pleasure in rubbing Freda up the wrong way—calling her a child, a chit, and many other irritating names, to show Freda and everybody else that she was *very* young, and ought not to be out of the school-room, hardly even out of the cradle and long clothes; and the worst of it was, Freda *felt* very young and very ignorant when it was thus conspicuously pointed out to her.

Freda, who considered herself quite grown up—hadn't she just turned sixteen?—and who had never, strictly speaking, been in a school-room; she had forgotten all about cradles, and never remembered being in one, or having had long clothes. Very likely she never had either; it would not have taken much to convince Freda that she never had; it was always short frocks—too short—that had bothered Freda. Was not

her new one, which Mrs. Ford-Barron had bought for her for the luncheon party, the very first long one she had ever had in her life? Oh, it was too humiliating!

Tears of vexation and venom filled Freda's blue eyes upon such occasions, as she stared in vicious, helpless rage at Sylvia's placid, cat-like countenance, or at the waves and coils of her pale gold hair.

Sylvia was cutting a rod for herself she did not expect, and poor little Freda's wounded vanity cried out in vengeance. Some day she meant to retaliate, but the day was not just yet, for Freda was down; and when she was down, her pert little tongue lost its power, but her sensitive feelings had not lost their power.

"A fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind." Grace slipped her hand through Freda's. "Let us go, Freda, and bring down the harp."

"Yes, *mavourneen*," cried Miss O'Connor O'Neill, "and have it ready by the time we all get up." She patted Freda's cheek as she passed her, to show Freda she loved her still despite Miss Sylvia's slighting remarks.

Freda recovered spirits, put her other hand through Noël's arm, and the three went up the marble stairs together. Sylvia's eyelids flickered in their direction for a moment, with that cat-like gleam in her eyes. She put her Sèvres cup down with a jingle, her *serviette à la point* stuffed into it, and a row of peach stones in the saucer. Sylvia loved the flesh-pots, and made much of her opportunities, but with a cool disregard for the feelings of her hostesses as regarded the bumping of pet china or rending of delicate lace—a disregard which was



all the more cool and deliberate, because she thought the old ladies were bent upon spoiling her plans with regard to Noël, and would very willingly have revenged herself on the tea-cups or anything else that came handy, just to show the old ladies that she was not to be trifled with with impunity, and to warn off insolent intruders, as she would have been happy to call them openly if she had only been provoked a little more.

Sylvia's was not a lovely nature; nor her aims, thoughts, or deeds what one would call noble. She thought by laying loud and public claim to Noël to bind him to her with bonds that could not be loosed, and to shake off all aspirants; and, as she had heard that all is fair in love and war, she, therefore, became aggressive, and beat off those who were so daring as to contest her claims, or enter the field against her, even although they were unconsciously brought there by Noël's preference.

The good old ladies knew nothing of Sylvia or her ambitions, and were quite unsuspecting of her malice. But such careless knocking about of a precious cup made even good-natured Miss O'Connor O'Neill stare a little. A frown gathered between her broad brows, and a look of disfavour came into her small, kindly eyes.

Miss Norah, too, could not resist putting up her lorgnette, to be sure, the handle was still on the cup, and mentally concluded that the least she could expect was a crack, disfiguring and distinct, and thought it too bad to lose both a cup and a serviette in one afternoon, for neither tea nor peach stains are conducive to the preservation of point-lace.

Miss Norah sighed and dropped her glasses, but Miss O'Connor O'Neill's eyes followed Sylvia as she swept up the staircase, not even glancing apologetically in their direction, and the look of disfavour grew stronger as she looked. She did not sigh, like her sister, but compressed her lips and was angry.

Grace was tuning her harp, an old one, restored without destroying the tone, which was sweet and clear enough to give credit to the legends regarding it.

"That's right, Grace, *colleen dhas*; something sweet, *avourneen*," Miss O'Connor O'Neill cried, and the anger died out of her face, and pleasure again beamed from it. "Something pretty, child, to make us love life, as we ought to do, when it is good, and not cherish wicked feelings in our hearts. *Wirasthru, wirasthru!* but it is a wicked world, to be sure, and we are sinners all, *Dia linn*."

Sylvia seated herself, and assumed a disconcerting stare, with a sneering, mocking little smile playing round her lips.

Grace drew her fingers over the strings, and looked at Miss O'Connor O'Neill for re-assurance.

Handsome Grace! standing where the many-coloured lights from the stained glass of a rose-window shone down upon her white frock, striking the gold wires of the harp with purple and green and red bands, was a creature of nerves and sensitiveness, but verily a child of wondrous grace and beauty. She played for a minute until her fingers grew more steady, then sang an old melody, low and sweet, with a wailing ring through it, which brought out the words of the song with thrilling effect:—



## LEGEND OF THE IRISH HARP.

'Tis told how this harp, which I play now for thee,  
Was once a Siren, who sang 'neath the blue sea ;  
And oft through the billows, at twilight she roved,  
To meet on the shore a youth whom she loved.

But her love was in vain, he left her to weep,  
And her shining gold ringlets in tear-drops she steeped.  
Heaven looking in pity, changed the sea-maiden's form  
To the sweet-toned harp, love's sorrows to charm.

On a white-crested billow she gracefully came,  
Entwining herself lovingly round the harp's frame ;  
To its soft tones of true love she mournfully sings,  
And the strands of her hair compose the gold strings.

So ever this harp mingles loving with tears,  
Speaks to lovers alone, none else its strain hears,  
Or can read its soft music, so wild and so low,  
As it breathes of true love and of sorrow and woe.

The last trembling notes glide into another Irish melody, and reverberate through the domed roof, roll and surge with as much passion and power as they ever did through Tara's halls, of which the sweet-voiced Irish bard sang. Then it glides into—

“ Dear harp of my country ! in darkness I found thee ;  
The cold chain of silence had hung o'er thee long,  
When proudly, my own island harp, I unbound thee,  
And gave all thy chords to light, freedom, and song.”

Mrs. Ford-Barron and her brother were charmed ; little Freda delighted that they were charmed ; and Miss O'Connor O'Neill and Miss Norah immensely pleased because the others were so. Mrs. Ford-Barron expressed

her delight in a gush of praise. She was not of the type of English who think Ireland is made up of Paddies, pigs, poverty, and potatoes; moonlighting, boycotting, rioting, and rack-renting, and rest quite satisfied with that amount of knowledge, never dreaming or caring that there is anything more to know. She did not think, like Sylvia, that coming to Ireland was next to going to Fiji before the natives were converted from cannibalism—if, indeed, Ireland did not count first in terror, and Fiji second in her mind.

Sylvia quite expected to be popped off from behind every thorn-bush, and had never yet left off casting apprehensive glances at every waving bough, thinking it was a wicked Paddy going to knock her on the head with his sprig of shillelagh. Oh, yes! of course, she knew there were three-legged skillets in Ireland; and every crow she saw flying, she thought, was an Irish pot being flung at her head—the way Jenny Geddes threw the three-legged stool at the heads of the bishops. She quite believed skillets were used as weapons of defence and offence—were not they found in Irish bogs, same as other implements of war?

Sylvia's favourite expression was, "So Irish," and Freda had not yet been able to discover Sylvia's meaning; but she hoped to do so some day, for that there must be *some* meaning in it she felt assured, although she had not yet come at its proper definition.

Mrs. Ford-Barron moved with delighted exclamations from object to object; now a group of Roman glass vases, exquisitely moulded and iridescent in tint, like so much shot silk; then a curiously carved ladle for *poi*, from Tahiti; a lobster carved in stone, from Easter



Isle, that sculpture gallery with Southern skies for its lights, and the foam of Pacific billows, forming bold and artistic drapery, for its walls. Yet, no matter how much she may gaze, it whispers not a syllable of all the rock kings, stone giants of its native land, nor of the wild beasts, sea-monsters, reptiles, and fabulous creatures, all of stone, strewn upon its very sea-shores; not a word, not a hint, not a breath, nor a suggestion; no, no, nothing; no keystone to the meaning of it all any more than the necklets, armlets, and anklets of wild beasts' teeth tell you how many fellow-creatures they have devoured for their owner before they become articles of ornamental decoration for beings hardly less savage than those same wild beasts.

But Mrs. Ford-Barron only thought how ingenious they must be to make such pretty trifles from teeth, sea-shells, fruit-seeds, nuts, and fibre. And Noël—Noël who was supposed to be a little crazed about such things, where was he? That he was not bent upon examining, and inspecting, and discoursing upon them, giving short two-and-a-half minute lectures, and telling parallel stories, dilating and expatiating upon the beauties of his own collection, and making Miss Norah's nerves creep at the thrilling stories of hair-breadth escapes and daring adventures through which he had passed to obtain them, leaving the impression with that good lady, that of necessity hers must be decidedly inferior, while he, in his secret heart, was devoured with covetousness and an overwhelming desire to break the eighth commandment; and an opportunity to do so not occurring, vent his spleen in sneering at the absurdity of anyone presenting such ridiculous rubbish

as curiosities; laughing to scorn, putting down with malice prepense the old lady and her treasures—where was he that he was not doing all these things? Holding his own, maintaining his dignity, and asserting his superiority over the weaker sex, showing them what a hopeless thing it is that they should ever come to know anything whatever about such matters? Where was he, and what was he doing, that they were all wasted upon him, and he not paying the slightest heed to them whatever?

If Noël was covetous, the object of his desire must be the old harp, or why did he spend such a time helping Grace to cover it up and get it put away? The cover went awry, because Noël was not looking at it, but at Grace, with her blushing cheeks. He pulled it on crooked, and it had to come off again. The second time was hardly any better; it took numberless tugs from Grace on one side, and Noël upon the other, before it could be said to be properly brought into subjection, he making some sort of weak remark about many hands making light work, which she did not quite catch, because of the brilliancy of her cheeks; and he not knowing what he was saying, because he was so bent upon watching the last of the ladies passing away out of sight behind an immense screen of Chinese workmanship, said to be value for a man and a half, because one man had spent his whole life-time upon it, and another half his life-time finishing it.

Noël was not thinking of those men; he was only wanting a group of ladies to pass out of his sight, behind their labours; and when the last skirt had switched round it, Grace found herself clasped in an embrace



which would have been ruinous to the ancient *relique* if it had come in contact with it.

A flood of incoherent words of love poured into her ear, and a shower of impassioned kisses upon her lips. Noël had entirely forgotten all about sense and reason—the two great factors he always intended to bring to bear upon his matrimonial intentions. He was neither sensible nor reasonable—he was in love, and what man in love is ever either? He had a thousand things to say to her, and only about half as many seconds to say them in. He wanted to say them all at once, and did not know which he wished to say first or most. And then, besides, actions are more expressive than words, or he felt they were, and those same actions rather wasted, or, if not quite wasted, used up the limited time at his disposal.

But the two combined were quite convincing to Grace. He would have been astonished if she had not been convinced, and would have wondered what more was necessary. He loved her, and thought he could not say it too often. She loved him, and could not hear it too often. He kissed her, and looked for little cupids in her eyes, and found them there; flung back his head and laughed for joy, and kissed again—watched the little dimples play about her mouth, felt the glow of her cheek as he pressed his own against it; read the love-light in her violet eyes, and then—Oh, this wicked world!—felt a shock as of icy water down his back—brought back, dear youth, from your sweet romance!

Grace sprang away. It was only Miss O'Connor O'Neill, who had raised her voice by way of warning,

being the friend of all lovers—for she was neither so old nor so plain as to forget the days of her youth, when she herself was pretty and romantic, and was very quick at suspecting young folks when they lingered round corners and behind draught screens and such-like hiding places. The moment they began to show a tendency towards playing at hide-and-seek, her sympathies were aroused, and it was astonishing the faculty she had for devising ways and means of furthering the cause, and thwarting people who were in any way likely to interrupt *tableaux* round unexpected turnings. She exerted her energies just now to prevent an *expose*, cleared her throat warningly, and with a loudness so startling that it shocked herself, woke the echoes, and nearly frightened our lovers out of their wits—or, rather back into them again.

“Ah, well, indeed, then, an’ is it the old spinning wheel ye admire, Miss Manfield?” She looked at Sylvia with a challenge in her manner, as if she would dare her to say she had done anything unusual. She had cleared her throat certainly, but folks find it necessary to do that once in a while, and why should not Miss O’Connor O’Neill do it if she choose? She defied any one to say it was not her customary mode of doing that little office for herself, and the consciousness of having only drawn attention to what she wished to conceal made her vexed with herself, and a little brazen towards Sylvia.

Sylvia lifted her brows for a moment superciliously and her languid eyelids slightly, but not enough to look at Miss O’Connor O’Neill; dropped her fingers upon the wheel, and spun it round the wrong way, let off the



band, and fussed the flax. Then she looked full at Miss O'Connor O'Neill, and laughed mockingly; she had her mean revenge.

Miss O'Connor O'Neill grew red with wrath and helplessness, but Miss Norah came to the rescue. "Oh, dear, dear, how unfortunate, to be sure. Oh, the band is only off—the effect of turning it the wrong way, Miss Manfield. You know we must adhere to the customs of our ancestors, and turn everything sun-wise—pure sun-worship, my dear—but nevertheless the correct way of doing things if we wish to be attended by success, and the fates to smile upon us in our labours. This was my grandmother's wheel, Mrs. Ford-Barron, and this some of her handiwork." She opened a tiny drawer, and drew forth a small hank of flax, spun so delicately, that a whole hank could be drawn through a wedding-ring, one of which encircled it, by way of showing the feat possible.

She then dropped it in again; and, accompanied by Noël, led the way downstairs, and out upon the lawn, with her sister in the rear, observing Sylvia out of the corners of her little eyes, with a look in them anything but charitable. But presently it passed away, for she was not one who bore malice; sweet nature and kindness were bound about her neck and written upon the tablets of her heart.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

WHEN "FEMALE FRIENDSHIPS ARE OF RAPID GROWTH."—  
SYLVIA WORKS HER WICKED WILL, FATE PLAYS INTO HER  
HANDS.—HOW LAZY TALL DANCES AT THE DEATH OF THE  
HOPES OF HIS BENEFACTRESS.

**S**YLVIA became exceedingly friendly with Grace on the way downstairs, slipped a plump hand through her arm, and kept her all to herself, became quite confidential, even to the disclosure of her heart secrets, her love affairs, and matrimonial prospects. Grace never had had such confidences placed in her before, and found them rather embarrassing, not to say disconcerting and distressing.

Only consider, ye maidens all, what it must be like to have a young woman starting up by your side, forcing her love affairs upon your unwilling ears in the blandest and sweetest manner—choosing her wedding clothes, selecting her furniture, and meditating upon what part of the world she will choose for her honeymoon, and explaining all the family arrangements regarding her marriage; telling you what the turtle-doves will do and say when they settle down to billing and cooing, home life, and mutual bliss, and the hero of it all——. You were playing at tableaux with him a minute and a half ago round a draught screen. Oh! ain't it a wicked world? and were not men deceivers ever? and of all



deceivers, was not Noël the greatest? and of wronged maidens did not Grace reach the superlative degree of eminence? and of injured innocence was not Sylvia the personification?

She was amazingly friendly. The more Grace wished to withdraw and give Miss Sylvia to understand that she had had enough of it, all the more did Miss Sylvia affectionately cling to her arm and prattle sweetly, without being in the least languid or fatigued, but, Pardiggle-like, never weary in well-doing. Told sweet tales of Noël and herself from tiniest babyhood, of how devoted they had been to each other, and how their parents had arranged it all at the time they chose their names, and even before that; and how the two had sealed the bargain as soon as they were able to walk and talk—sealed it with a kiss in their sweet childhood (probably at the stage when babies kiss with their mouths wide open). It ought to have reassured Grace that it was still, as then, an open question, not to be closed without the consent of the principals, the chief of whom was unfortunately rather—shall we say—quite willing to leave it still open? Wicked young man!

But Sylvia did not say so. She only told Grace what everybody saw as plain as a pikestaff. Noël upon his two bended knees beseeching, nay, imploring, the dilatory young lady for mercy's sake, for heaven's sake, and all sakes on earth, to end his suspense and name the day, and which Miss Sylvia confided she intended to do *very soon*.

She patted Grace patronisingly upon the hand, and told her not to mind Noël, as he had rather a weakness

for pretty girls. He was always going on so, but he meant nothing.

“The fact is, he is just a little—well, a *little* volatile. One can’t have *everything* one wants, you know,” Miss Sylvia sighed. “But he is the least little bit. I would not tell you, dear Grace (I may call you Grace, may I not?), only I can’t bear to see you deceived. He is not to be trusted, dear; few young men are to be trusted. I often tell him it is cruel of him, but he only laughs and says he does not mean anything whatever, only a ‘lark,’ calls me a ‘jealous darling;’ and says he will be good and settle down, like a patriarch, with me to keep him steady, if only I will name the day.”

But Grace is more than convinced of his perfidy, and coming to a little postern door in the peach wall, drags away the arm upon which Sylvia leans so confidently, and, having shaken her off, rushes away to hide her shame and humiliation from Sylvia’s mocking eyes.

Sylvia opened her eyes wide for a moment, and stared after her, then laughed, and called her a verdant little fool for giving in her guns so soon, swallowing it all so readily—showing no fight; affected to despise her greenness, while she was uncomfortably impressed by the purity of a heart, innocent and without guile. Sneered mentally at herself that *she* had never been such an innocent or such an *ingenue* as not to be able to see through fabrications, hold more than her own, dodge the most artful, and play a winning game.

But if she sneered at herself for a moment it was only because she so admired and had such faith in her own powers, that she considered she could give herself so much liberty. Not at all because she was sorry that



she had done it—she was not. Only sometimes even a half-dead conscience can give an unpleasant little prick—just the least bit—wounding to self-vanity, and makes a success a thing hardly worth the trouble, and gives it a counter-balance, which makes it quite undeserving the name of victory.

It was Sylvia's conscience gave her a twinge for a moment, but she soon silenced it, and betook herself to the completion of the game in hand. She was not going to drop what she had taken up for any number of twinges, dull or sharp, defined or undefined, or for any other reason whatsoever, she was at present aware of. So through Noël's arm was slipped the same friendly hand which, a few minutes before, rested confidentially upon Grace's.

Miss Norah was telling the story of a little sacred well—or holy well—set in a square plateau of green grass, like a pretty dimple. A spring of purest water, clear as crystal and cold as ice; bubbling up perpetually, and overflowing in a trickling stream; trickling and gliding along amongst the ferns, through the grass, over the stones, down by the hill-side, under the willows, amongst the brambles and rushes and ragwort, the meadow-sweet, cat-tails, and seven sisters; through the tangled grass-roots and the sluggish moss-water; over great blocks of pre-historic firs; under gnarled thorns, well-nigh as ancient, which overshadow more brown water, where the silver trout and pike have turned brown, as well as fat, and where the stickle-back grow so lazy, and sun themselves in every gleam that comes through the boughs so near the surface, that small boys skim them up by the hundred, and

carry them away in capfuls to populate new aquariums, where they grow pale and thin, lose their plump sides and brown skin, and are naught but ghosts of their former selves.

Away, away, away! down to the great swimming river the little streamlet trickles. Down from the holy well—the well that sprung up in the spot where the blessed St. Patrick himself broke the point off his crozier in the earth just by the old Friary doorway—the little spring which he blessed to the use of the monks, with whom he conversed at the time, and to the use of all the monks that should dwell in the Friary thenceforward and for ever after. A short hose cast up a fountain-like jet of water, which kept the grass green and fresh in the hottest weather; and clumps of shamrocks, brown and four-leaved, and of pink and white sweet-scented clover, decked its border—the saint and the emblem of Ireland's isle. So it was kept in the days of their ancestor; so it is now in the days of Miss Norah and her sister. But who can say where it shall be in the days to come?

“Long ago we had fairies, too,” said Miss Norah. “Down by the old mere is the fairy cave where their palace was; and there the wicked fairies tempted a poor nun to steal out from her convent in the twilight to meet a lover. The good fairies were angry, and frightened her so, she stumbled, fell into the mere, and was drowned; and 'tis said a grey shadow, like a veiled nun, wanders about its borders, part mist, part shadow, part spirit, and partakes so much of all three that none know which it is most, or if it is only a streak of mist or an unhappy soul for whom there is no rest, but must



for evermore wander about, bemoaning the violation of her holy vows.

“Ah! *wirasthru, wirasthru!*” sighed Miss O’Connor O’Neill, “but we are fallen creatures.” When she lamented for another it was with the delicate sympathy which included herself, so that she might not seem too righteous where another had fallen, or too severe in her judgment of a fault, but rather to palliate it a little, so that she might come near enough to soothe a wounded heart.

The horses came round at this moment—Mrs. Ford-Barron’s car. She affected a jaunting car, because to be in Rome and not do as the Romans do was no part of her principle. When she made up her mind to live in Ireland, she made it up also to do as folks do there.

So Williams, the stolid gardener, coachman, and general factotum, mounted guard over the one large horse, which might have been a twin-brother of the Rector’s own horse. Evidently, the same taste had been exercised in the choice, and had hit upon an exactly similar object. “Quiet and steady” was the hall-mark, and nothing else in particular.

Noël and Freda had ridden over, so The Ladybird and the cream pony were in attendance, with dangling stirrups and champing bits.

Noël had been glancing about in search of Grace for some time, utterly unconscious of the workings of that young lady’s mind, or the change that had been brought about in her sentiments towards him. He stepped within the doorway to find her for just another word, another handclasp, and, perhaps, something else, too, and saw—what he saw.

There stood Grace in the dim hall, a young giant, six feet high, with grey tweed-clad, shoulders of a corresponding breadth, bending over her, making pump handles of her arms, and in a voice that would have done credit to Goliath, calling her all sorts of endearing names.

“Grace, you’re a jewel rare, a darling, a ——”

But a mocking whisper from Sylvia drowned the rest.

“Your pretty little Irish girl evidently believes in more than one string to her bow.” The voice of the serpent, the demon jealousy.

Noël stepped back into the sunlight, with eyes hard as granite, cold as steel. He handed up Sylvia to her place without a word, and then his sister, and turned to his hostesses.

Grace stood in the open door looking at him, with pale cheeks, compressed lips, and eyes not a whit less hard and cold than his own. His grew fierce with wrath as he looked at her. For an instant their fingers touched and dropped away; each dropped away as if the other were freezing ice or red-hot iron—dropped away without a word, their bright dream blighted, as if it were killed dead at one fell stroke.

Noël picked up Freda’s switch, which she had dropped; waved his hand to the old ladies, and rode away upon The Ladybird, without a single glance back, anger and jealousy gnawing at his heart-strings, and bitter sorrow, too, over a shattered ideal, a fallen idol, a thing of clay.

And Grace wept out her heart, with her face buried in a Japanese embroidered cushion, which had, perhaps,



seen tears before; for the pretty ladies, with their sparkling eyes and jetty hair, their pencilled brows and gleaming teeth, their straight skirts, fluttering fans, and flirting ways, they, too, have their griefs, their loves, their joys; and bright eyes shine all the brighter for being washed with tears, just as summer skies do after showers, lightning storms, thunder-clouds, torrents of angry rain, and then calm skies of serenest blue and sunniest temper.

But Grace had only arrived at the torrent stage. Angry thoughts filled her wounded heart.

Oh! that he could be so cruel, so heartless; and she had thought him a king amongst men. But now he had shown himself such a vile creature, such a mean nature, such a paltry thing; fluttering about, like an inconstant wind, or a foolish butterfly from flower to flower, sipping the honey, breaking the hearts; fickle, unstable, unfaithful, heartless, careless; a man without worth or honour; one whom she had set up as superior to his kind, more worthy of admiration and love than his faulty fellows—set him in a niche in the shrine of her heart, and loved him, and of whom she had thought—

“His worth, his actions, and majestic air,  
A man descended from the gods declare.”

—*Virgil.*

Talbot O'Connor O'Neill, half the cause of the whole bother, leaned in the doorway, and whistled as gaily as a lark, with the abandon of perfect content and complete satisfaction; whistled a gay operatic air, which made Grace more wretched, more utterly heart-

broken, for to every note her racked brain supplied the words—

“Men that combine such traits divine,  
Ever dare, never spare, never care.”

Over and over again he whistled them, with his hands in his pockets, the heels of his boots beating time upon the great stone-step, in the lightness of his heart. “Ever dare, never spare, never care;” lingered over them languishingly; “never care”—flourishing an extra shake at the last words with great vigour and gusto; “never care”—as if he were a very demon, gloating, Bluebeard-like, over the wreck of a maiden’s heart, utterly unconscious that every note and stamp of his foot sent a stab through the heart of her who had been only a short quarter of an hour before his benefactress, his northern star, his leading light, to the sum of twenty-five pounds; for Talbot’s secret heart was set upon schemes as secret—schemes not to be told in Gath, nor for worlds to be whispered in Ascalon.

Lazy Tall (he had earned that name for himself)—Lazy Tall had never done anything in his life but lie upon his back, looking from beneath the brim of his sailor’s hat into the depths of the purling, dappled heavens, weaving visions there; or counting the silver stars in the deep indigo sky upon a moonless night, and building them up in shining castles upon the Milky Way, instead of being engrossed in the mysteries of Greek and Latin text, or lost in the maze of French verbs. He had heard some of the latter were regular, but his firm conviction was the whole lot were, every one,



irregular, erratic, and irrational; and in the idleness and contentment of his soul, had not one single wish to disabuse his mind of the conviction. He did a little besides—he scribbled continually on scraps of paper, and thrust them deep into the depths of his wide-mouthed, cavern-like pockets. And his mother, who was of a frugal mind, when she turned them out, supposed them to be waste paper her careful son kept for the purpose of economising matches—for to her they were as unsolvable as the riddles of the Sphinx; and if she had only known it, were as wickedly devouring her son.

And so it was Lazy Tall, expressing his gratitude, who had helped Sylvia to work her wicked will; and by way of reward helped, unconsciously, to break Grace's heart, by sending her lover away in a jealous tantrum, and whistled and danced with a will the refrain to her blighted hopes. But "*Sempre il mal non viene per nuocere*" (Evil does not always come to injure.)

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## CHAPTER XV.

NOËL DESPONDENT.—FREDA FRIGHTENS SYLVIA OUT OF MARRY-  
ING THE SQUIRE.—JIMMY ENTERTAINS HIS MASTER'S GUESTS  
OF A MORNING.—THE RECTOR SERENELY BLISSFUL.

FOUR weeks had not sufficed to lift Noël Chester out of the depths of gloom into which he had fallen over the worthlessness of the female sex in general, and Grace Wardwood in particular. For four whole weeks he had been the most wretched young man, without exception, on either side of the equator. The lights of *borealis* or *australis* had never shone on any object more miserable than our handsome young hero, blighted in his heart affections. He would willingly have linked fingers with Beaconsfield's "Young Duke," and asked, with him, in the same impassioned and despairing tones an explanation to the puzzle of *why* he was not loved.

But as the powers that be are not afraid of losing either their purse or their lives, they do not answer such brigand-like stand-and-deliver questions, even to young Dukes: so it was not any wonder there was no verbal reply to the wildly-despairing query of *our* poor young hero. Indeed, none of his questions were answered any more than that. So presently he left off asking for reasons of the winds—it was generally to the winds he appealed—in a vague and breathless wonder, that



the trees did not stoop down and tell him the whys and the wherefores of all he wanted to know.

He left off, we say, and took to fishing all day in Squire Aylesbury's best preserves, or kicking his heels around the Rectory, or teasing Freda's life out, neglecting Sylvia, and vexing the gentle heart of the Rector's bride, and his own affectionate sister; rode The Ladybird into a foam, or else let her eat her head off in her stall beside fat old Dobbin, generally behaving himself rather badly. He was a very nice young man, this hero of ours; but the fact of the matter is, he got into an ill-humour once in a way, when any thing was denied him; took a pet, in short, possibly to show the contrast of how nice he could be when he was good-humoured; and everybody, fortune included, gave him his heart's desire.

Mrs. Ford-Barron declared one morning, when July was giving way to August, and the morning was delightfully fresh, with the dew yet lingering in shaded corners, where the sun had not dried it up—the very day for a pic-hic, but Noël was obdurate, and could not be bent to the will of the ladies—Mrs. Ford-Barron declared—and the morning-room at the Rectory was the scene of her complaint—he was picking a quarrel with the toes of his own boots. She likewise declared he was a wicked boy, and deserved to have his ears boxed. But he wasn't doing either, particularly at that precise moment. It was only comments on his past misdeemeanours, called up by his decided and absolute refusal, an hour ago, to make a gentleman-slavey of himself in the woods that afternoon, for Squire Aylesbury, or the Hon. Tom Russell—whichever one of them chanced

to come first upon the scene to pay their addresses to Miss Manfield—that young lady having devised the pretty little freak of gipsy-teasing in the woods, as a preliminary movement to bringing either one or other of the aforesaid gentlemen to their knees. Which? She had not quite made up her mind, but intended to leave it to the whim of the moment,

The Rectory had been besieged for the past month by both of them; and the offerings laid, metaphorically, at Miss Sylvia's feet, had been many and fair. Specimens of the Joscelyn hot-house grapes, and choicest flowers arrived, with the Hon. Tom's valet and cards; the Hon. Tom himself following in due course; braces of game for the Rector; offers of sport—shooting and fishing—to Noël; fruit and flowers, and general offers of amusements and entertainments to the ladies from Aylesbury Hall—until the inhabitants of the Rectory well-nigh grew delirious with the all-pervading fragrance of hot-house bloom. Even Sylvia had grown weary of delicate fruits, and Freda declared she did not care she never saw game all the days of her life again.

So Sylvia, having parted our lovers and not finding any improvement in the prospects of her own plans, had reluctantly made up her mind to devoting her cotton-made-coin to the brightening of Aylesbury Hall or to the establishment of an income for the Hon. Tom for *part* of his life.

She sat this morning in the easiest chair in the Rectory morning-room. Divided between the two, she ate a peach from Aylesbury and fastened a bunch of roses from Joscelyn in her dress, utterly undecided; a little frown of impatience upon her brow, because Noël



would not make a gipsy tea-party in the woods for the furtherance of her plots. Sylvia meant to have it done romantically—be he old or young, withered or fresh, grey or gold, she would not have it in prose. Beautiful woods, a pretty tea-party, a stroll under the colonnade of beeches in the Aylesbury park, would, she guessed, bring it about in the most unexceptionable manner: so no wonder she was angry with the obdurate Noël.

Noël lay upon his back tossing biscuits to old Clara, the Rector's one-eyed setter, who had laid herself down at his feet the first time he had come to the Rectory; grovelled in the very dust, licked his hands, and ever since had shown the deepest love and devotion a dumb creature can show—a very passion of love. Nothing he bade her do was too much to show her loving obedience or express her gratitude for his caressing notice. She, poor, old, one-eyed, brown creature, for very love, recalled the days of her youth in her efforts to spring up a foot from the ground to catch the biscuits he tossed into her poor old mouth, from which the fangs had long since departed, leaving only one loose, disreputable-looking one protruding over her lower lip in the most absurdly foolish manner.

She continued to spring as long as there was a biscuit left, and looked as if she liked it; and when they were all done, sat crouched, her two fore-paws extended, her tail beating the ground, and her one blinking vigilant eye fixed upon him in hopes of, if not of any more biscuits, at least some more fun and notice.

“That is an exception to the good old proverb, sister mine,” he exclaimed, pointing to the dog, “about teaching an old dog new tricks.”

"Oh, no," said Freda; "these are not new tricks, Master Noël, they are only old ones revived. Do you suppose Clara never leaped for a biscuit before you came across her, sir? She had only forgotten the way to play because she had been badly treated. Poor old Clara!"

Freda pulled her ears in a way dogs like. Clara liked it, and lifted the one she expected to receive the caress next, to have it ready to hand, and dropped the other that it had been bestowed upon before—lifted the one and dropped the other alternately.

"Well, Mdlle. Silvia, is it old tricks revived or new ones you mean to teach your gentlemanly visitors this evening?" Noël asked Sylvia. "And which, might a fellow ask, do you intend to put to school again? One would think either of them had forgotten ever being at school or had been so long at the old tricks they had grown weary and needed new ones to brighten them up a bit."

Sylvia laughed, and smoothed her white fingers over her pale gold hair. Sylvia's hair was never ruffled—always in a state of perfection—waved, coiled, curled; her fringe never in a tumbled-up, frizzy mass, but in thousands of distinct little rings, like a lay-figure in a hair-dresser's shop window; or, as Freda expressed it, as if she never went to bed in it, but took it off, as Miss O'Connor O'Neill's uncle, the Judge, took off his curled wig. Oh, no; altogether Sylvia was a very composed person; her hair never blown about, her laces never crumpled, her dress never tumbled, her hands never soiled, her skin never heated, but, like her manner, perfectly cool and composed, and, to Freda, terribly confusing and discomposing.



A calm take-you-all-in-from-head-to-foot look from Sylvia disconcerted Freda sadly; tumbled her frock, flushed her cheeks, heated her hands, made her hair become untidy, her legs grow longer, and her general actions clumsy to such a degree that Freda could have shed pockets-full of tears over her misery and over her disreputable appearance as shown in the mirror of contempt expressed in Sylvia's comprehensive glance.

Sylvia sat in this same state of cool perfection. She laughed a short laugh, and said: "My dear Noël, I had no idea you were curious on the subject."

"Curious! not at all, only a very proper desire to gain a little information on a very interesting question. Curiosity, my dear Sylvia, is a troublesome and much-to-be-deplored quality in the human animal, but searching after knowledge is both laudable and legitimate; and upon this subject—eh—ah—decidedly——"

"Oh, Noël, you know you were going to say, makes one decidedly curious; you know you were," Freda cries, seeing him floundering about unable to extricate himself. "You are dying to know; but, Sylvia, don't marry the Squire whatever you do; he's too—too—awfully—frightfully—" Freda was at a loss herself now for a word.

"Ghoulish," suggested Noël.

"Well, you know, he is ghostly, Noël," she said seriously, her eyes growing round with the recollection of all she had heard about the Squire, and saying it in a tone that accused Noël of knowing all about it. "He'll frighten you awfully, Sylvia. He walks about all night up and down stairs with a big dog beside him, and shoots pistols at the big dog; but he won't go away, but leaves marks of his paws on all the steps, which

can't be washed out. He walks through the locked door of the old Squire's rooms—right through it, Sylvia, without opening it, mind you. No one has ever been in but himself and the big dog ever since the old Squire died. He is frightened to go in in daylight, and it is said—Jimmy says,—the big dog squeezed the Squire nearly to death one night; and if you were there he might squeeze you to death when you are asleep, and you would never come awake again."

She made it as impressive as ever she could, and it was evident she was quite convinced on the matter herself.

"Freda, child, what shocking stories!" cried Mrs. Ford-Barron.

"Bloodthirsty, isn't he, Freda?" asked Noël, encouraging her.

"Well, ask Jimmy," she said, not noticing Noël, but turning to Mrs. Ford-Barron.

Jimmy, who was brushing up the crumbs from the carpet, caused by Noël and old Clara, stood up, tray in hand, his eyes as round as Freda's.

"It's every word as true as death, mem," he declared; "and far more nor Miss Freda says. I wouldn't take service in it, mem, if I was to get a guinea a day every day of my life. It's something fearsome, mem, they say, up there at night. They do say, mem, as the Squire would shoot you as fast as look at you if you met him on the stairs at night. He thinks everybody's ghosts, and they do say the banister of the stairs and the door-posts is riddled with shot, for all the times he thought they wur things catching at him."



"Nonsense, Hamilton, don't repeat such rubbish," said Mrs. Ford-Barron.

Noël laughed. Sylvia passed one large, white hand over the other in her lap. Freda and Jimmy were like statues of round-eyed terror and vivid imagination, although it was broad day.

"Well, indeed, indeed, mem, nobody ever saw the big dog in daylight. He isn't a living dog, mem. His paws are as big as cook's new saucepan, as she got for making that nice sauce as she brought the *restpea* of with her from foreign parts."

"All right, Hamilton, never mind the size, tell us more," said Noël.

"Well, sir, I did see the marks myself. The butler at the hall is my uncle, George's second wife's half-brother's son——"

"Oh, Lord, Hamilton! don't give us his pedigree. Let's hear about the marks."

"Well, the butler showed them to us, sir, and he says they do look like paint; but we could see as plain as plain, they were no paint, for such paint I never did see in my life, forby that, wee Joe Husting was coming by the Hall one night, and seen something that nearly put him into fits. He was mortal scared, sir, nearly to death, and he said he would never breathe what he did see to mortal man. But he would never set foot in the Hall, or any place belonging to it, again, sir, and neither did he. He walked seven mile and three-quarters, Irish measure, home before he would go the cross-cut through the beech-park, and always goes that roundabout way before he would go through Aylesbury" (*en passant*, the beech-park was the scene

of Sylvia's proposed gipsy tea-drinking that afternoon, and even her cool blood curdled), "which is only one mile and a quarter, sir."

"Do you mean to say it was the dog, Hamilton?" said Noël.

"Well, if it wuzn't the dog, what wuz it, sir? My uncle George seen him himself one night, sir."

Jimmy's pink cheeks lost colour; his brow was damp, and his round eyes grew rounder than ever. The brush and tray trembled in his hands, as if he had been in his uncle George's shoes, standing before the dog at that very moment.

"Go on, Hamilton, tell us more of it," said Noël; "let's hear all about it."

"My uncle George, sir, wuz at the Hall one night when it was pretty well on—gone half-past eleven, sir. He took a notion, sir, to get our old blunderbuss fixed up a bit, so as to be able to fowl a bit on Christmas Day, and old Jimmy Gordon kep' him that late, it wuz past eleven before he got to the Hall, but it wasn't so late but he thought he'd get a drink off the butler. My uncle never do take much, sir, but the butler wuz having porter for his supper, and my uncle being pressed like, couldn't well refuse; forby that, porter couldn't do much harm when he wuz going straight home to bed, sir. Well, anyhow, the Hall wuz all closed up, and lights put out for the night, when there wuz a fearful ringing at the Squire's bell. The butler wuz 'feard to go by hisself, sir. Nobody liked to go about through the house, sir, when the lights wuz out, and it wuz getting on for being late. They all liked to keep pretty near each other with plenty of



light, to keep them from thinking they saw anything. There was another fearful ring at the bell, and the butler had to go this time, and he says, 'Just you come to the foot of the stairs with a fellah, and bring the gun along for company,' which my uncle George did, both of them quaking, and everything so quiet they could hear each other's breath coming and going like steam-engines. My uncle George stayed at the foot of the stairs in the dark, while the butler went on up with the light. He wuzn't a minute gone out of sight when my uncle seen two big eyes, as red as blood, glaring at him from the stairs. He thought he'd have died; but the two big eyes glared at him still—glared and glared, till he began to gather his wits. He took out a sixpence, twisted it crooked in his teeth, put it in the gun, and pinked one of the red eyes with it. The old beast of a gun kicked his shoulder till he couldn't see anything but red stars for a long time, but at last he sees only one big, red eye staring, and hears the butler coming tearing along like one mad. That wuz the night, sir, the big dog squeezed the Squire. He must have had it done when my uncle seen him on the stairs. They give out it wuz a fit the Squire took, but my uncle knows the kind of fit it wuz. That—I—may—never—stir;—it's—as—sure—as—I'm—stanin'—here, sir, but *everybody* says it's Owld Nick!"

Noël, stretching his arms above his head, laughs aloud, settles his head on his hands again, and says:

"Then his Satanic Majesty is a big dog in Ireland, Hamilton? They tell us he is a handsome, charming, but very sorrowful young Prince Lucio in England.

You don't go in for such captivating devils here, Hamilton—eh?"

"No, indeed, sir," said Jimmy, with a weak, incipient giggle. Every one laughed, even Freda.

"That will do. Hamilton, is luncheon near ready?" Mrs. Ford-Barron asks. "The Rector has not returned, has he?"

"No, 'm. Please, 'm, cook says will it be a nice mixed salad with the cold trout? Luncheon's all ready but the salad, 'm."

Jimmy, in his natural state, would have said: "Yis, indeed, mem." But Jimmy, in his *Anglicé* state, says: "Yes, 'm." "No, 'm."

Sylvia, turning to Mrs. Ford-Barron, suppressing a yawn, exclaims: "Good gracious, what a footman! He will frighten you out of your wits, Vi!"

"Oh, it's not Jimmy," said Freda; "it's the Squire, Sylvia. He'll frighten you out of your wits if you go to Aylesbury Hall to live."

Truth to tell, Sylvia was rather uncomfortably impressed. No matter how little one cares, it is not by any means nice to have so many painful stories related of one's prospective husband. But she tossed her head carelessly, and stared superciliously at Freda, and said:

"No one would believe such silly stories but a chit like yourself, Freda. Pray, keep your advice until it is asked for. Do you suppose you know anything about such things at your age?" She sank back in her chair in contemptuous silence.

Poor Freda felt completely set down, and awfully youthful—inexperienced, beyond words. But, if she had only known it, she had got the better of Sylvia



beyond her dearest hopes or wishes. In all the times she had vowed vengeance upon Sylvia, she never could have hit upon a better plan than this of being even with her for the many annoyances she had put upon her. Sylvia's inclinations leaned towards the Squire rather than the Hon. Tom. Aylesbury Hall, without a title, was certainly better than a title without a Hall. But Freda talking foolish stories to that silly footman, or allowing him to tell them, left her without a choice; for Sylvia was very tender, indeed, with her own feelings, although not just so delicate with the feelings of other folks. She was angry, and went into luncheon with a flounce, without speaking to either Freda or Noël.

But the entertainment had given Noël quite a relish for the repast, and he helped Freda with a briskness unknown to him for many days. Mrs. Ford-Barron was anxiously looking towards the windows, in hopes of seeing the still-tarrying Rector, who thought the world well lost over a beautifully blooming rose, which he discovered at the gable-end of Sarah Ann Morrison's cottage-home, growing amongst nettles and gooseberry-bushes. A common red rose; but so bright, so pure, so fresh, so sweet! he was completely convinced he had never seen so fair a thing. He failed to recognise the bright blossom people planted over their spring wells for good-luck, and to shed its sweetness upon the waters reserved for domestic use, and thought it a new creation from the hand of an ever-bountiful Creator. He promised Sarah Ann a new half-crown for the root later on, when the proper time came to change it, and trotted home on old Dobbin in a state of serene bliss.

## CHAPTER XVI.

LAZY TALL BESIEGES THE RECTORY.—NOËL IN A STRANGE MOOD.

—NOËL GOES A-FISHING.—SYLVIA ADVISES NOËL, AND  
FREDA ADVISES SYLVIA.—FREDA FLEES PRECIPITATELY.

LUNCHEON was finished. The Rector had not yet appeared. Freda rolled some bread-crumbs on her plate with her finger-tips; Noël balanced a fruit-knife upon his forefinger; Sylvia smoothed her hair with her hand, a favourite gesture; and Mrs. Ford-Barron mentally arranged a fresh luncheon tray for her husband, while her eyes wandered over the table contemplatively, choosing out here and there the choicest of the things upon it, her mind's eye, at the same time, taking a review of the larder, its contents and possibilities.

"Hot or cold? Well, perhaps, a little of both," she concluded. "The filleted trout were delicious. Noël had caught so many that morning, cook would have to pot some. Potted trout, or fish of any kind, are acceptable at almost any meal, especially in the hot months, so cool and appetible. Grilled pigeon," she checked each item off upon her fingers, as school children, deficient in the addition table, seek to make up by a weak little rule of their own the want of the table they have never committed to memory. "Yes, those wood pigeons from Aylesbury are so plump. Well, if it is a sin to



kill nothing else, it is a sin to kill pigeons—to kill one's pets. Barbarous! We are Goths and Vandals still—like other beasts, preying one upon the other, the stronger upon the weaker. 'Tis our nature, I suppose. The pretty, innocent little wood doves, that coo so tenderly and lovingly—do they, in turn, scruple to peck and dab, gobble and devour, the still more helpless grubs, slugs, and earth-worms? And they, too—are not they eating away the life of some living thing? Ah, yes! So both they and we have come from the hand of God; so both they and we shall go on through all time, despite a few abstainers, a few gorgers, the few to whom to eat is deathly, the many to whom not to eat is still more deathly. So it is, and no philosophising or logical reasoning can alter the fact."

"Grilled pigeon and melted butter," she went on  
"A nice fresh water-melon."

Melons, the Rector declared, good, ripe melons, wiped away the weariness and ennui resulting from undue excitement and want of sleep, like a magical wand—literally wipes it away. Breakfast upon plain bread and butter, weak tea, and *plenty* of ripe melon, and you will know it no more.

"Hamilton, are there not some ripe melons in that frame by the bee-hives?" she asks of Jimmy, who comes to clear the table,

"Yes, 'm, master he took out six 'm this morning, and told me to put them in the store-room; nice, big, large ones, 'm. They're not up yet, 'm; but in the pantry by cook's fruit, for preserving, 'm."

"Very well, I shall come and see them directly. Whoever can that be?"

Well she might ask. An immense horse had come thundering up to the door, his rider flinging himself out of the saddle almost before the horse stopped, and knocked upon the knocker enough to wake the dead, or, like a besieger of old, come to storm an ancient fortress. Jimmy, as timid retainer, went to parley the foe, and ushered in none other than Lazy Tall. They had all clustered round one of the long, open French windows, and looked over their shoulders expectantly at the new-comer.

Talbot O'Connor O'Neill had come with a message to the Rector from his aunt, and his coming changed earth, air, and sky to at least one person in the Rectory; and that one our depressed, gloomy, down-spirited, not to say broken-hearted, young hero, Mr. Noël Chester. He had something of the feeling Rip Van Winkle, the celebrated, must have had, when he awoke up from his little nap of twenty years; that is, he could not believe his eyes, the sight he saw, and rubbed them vigorously to convince himself that he slept not.

Lazy Tall was a sproutling, who had outstripped his years. He stood six-foot-three in his stockings last time of measurement, but no one could vouch he had not sent up his ambitious tendrils a couple of inches since then. His shoulders were broad accordingly; his voice rumbled like young thunder. But Lazy Tall was in the very midst of that unfortunate stage when the term "a youth of tender years" best applies. Tender, poor boy, he was by nature, and tender by nurture. It was not so very long ago since it had been told of Tall how one morning, sitting over a very pleasant breakfast, but in a very doleful mood, recounting his many woes,



he suddenly remembered he had not got any supper the night before, and shed gushing tears of rage and indignation over the thought; and when it was unkindly told of him, crushed his huge knuckles into his eyes, and brought out great salt drops of vexation. He was a giant in stature, a cat in strength, and with a heart or courage no greater than a chicken. But he was kindly, gentle, loving, generous, and grateful withal, and a boy, who, when he outgrew his weakness and youth, had all the attributes of a fine man.

But was it of this boy, without a hair upon his face, Noël Chester had been jealous?—this boy who had not yet left off weeping like a girl, over his small grievances; who was only stepping into man's estate, who was in his *salad* days, and knew nothing of loving and hating as men know them—knew nothing of the world—hardly knew he was alive. Ye gods! what a pretty dance the green-eyed monsters, jealousy and envy, lead men (and women, too, for that matter), and what folly they do commit!

Noël wondered if he himself were taking St. Vitus' dance; to say the least of it, he felt queer, he felt light-headed; he felt like a balloon, when the last bag of ballast has been dropped out. He felt like a cork upon the water, bobbing about without any stamen whatever, without moorings—even without solidity. He quite concluded he must be like the shadowy visitant who could be seen out and in through; and had half a mind, and even turned to Freda, to ask her if she could see through him without the aid of the X-rays. All the time he could hear that thundering voice telling Mrs. Ford-Barron about Grace and the £25, and all his little

plans, and his gratitude to Grace, and everything about himself, for it was not difficult to make Tall friendly and loquacious ; but he heard it in such a maze that it was impossible to make head or tail of it. He only felt as if all the song-birds of the earth had gathered together and sang a poem of jubilation in his heart—sang the truth, the purity, the goodness and beauty of Grace Wardwood—sang it in an orchestra of millions of voices, that all the world might hear ; in other words, he felt unutterably happy. He heard the Rector come in, and the chatter of voices, saw Freda shake her finger at her brother, and declare it was to get a little tray of good things all to himself, which made him stay away from luncheon. “ You know it was, *mon frère* ? So don’t deny, sir ;” heard Mrs. Ford-Barron bustling away about that same tray, and saw Hamilton carry it in, and heard Talbot pressed to partake, and when he declined, and betook himself to horse again ; bestowed upon him such a hearty hand-shake as made the colour rise in Tall’s cheeks ; made him lift a foot with a sharp catch, draw in his breath sharply through his teeth with pain, and contemplate with rueful countenance his white, crushed, sticking-together fingers, and, with a strong desire rising within him, to *bestow* his blessing, literally, upon him by way of returning the compliment.

But Noël was quite unconscious of the vengeful feelings he awoke in Tall’s heart, for still the music rang in his own ; still the breezes wafted whispers of joy, and the nodding flowers shed forth fragrance no sweeter than the touch of Grace Wardwood’s lips ; the whispering leaves murmured, “ She waits,” and the boughs



beckoned him to come, like the finger of fate, "This way, this way, this way—thou must come;" and he leaned forward and answered, as if to a calling voice, "I come, my love, I come," a soft whisper borne upon the winds—the voice of his soul speaking to his love.

The midges danced within the maze their short-lived day of delight, and the soft words disturbed them not; the great lazy bees sailed and hummed, drinking the honey-cups of life, and the soft words disturbed them not; the old rooks cawed in the tall elms, and the soft words quieted them not; the milch-cows slept in the shade, and the soft words awoke them not; old Clara crunched and licked a bone, and, for her master's words, ceased not; the good world wagged and jogged around and for a few soft words paused not; time wielded the scythe, fate flung the shuttle, and destiny, with outstretched fingers, hung over all.

"Whither away, O Noël, the sly?" asked Freda from the door-steps, as she saw him coming downstairs with his rod and fishing tackle.

"Fishing," he said, enigmatically.

"My dear Noël, we don't want any more trout just now; we should prefer your company. Surely you are not going trout-fishing?" queried his sister.

"Trout" (dreamily). "Ah, no, fair sister mine! I hope to have better sport."

"It is probably Irish bog-witches he goes a-fishing," said Sylvia, spitefully. She knew he had been undeceived about Talbot O'Connor O'Neill and Grace, and knew, too, that it was possible he might also hear of her own deception, so her sting was venomously pointed. "Or Will-o'-the-wisps, which lead men into quagmires,

or, like the Sirens of old, lead them to destruction. Don't, I beseech of you, dear Noël, get yourself into a hole, lest you howl and want out again" (Sylvia forgot to be elegant). "We shall not pity you, I warn you, so be wise in time, and don't throw away good advice when it is given you."

"You are talking rot, Sylvia," said Freda rather impolitely. "Who ever heard of anybody fishing in bogs? I never did, I'm sure;" but no one listened to Freda.

Noël took off his tweed cap, and bowed mockingly before Sylvia. "When I want advice I shall certainly come to you, fair counsellor," he said, "only if I took it I should be afraid of the fees I should have to pay; they might come heavy on a fellow."

Sylvia's cheeks slowly reddened and her eyes gleamed; she had been tauntingly cool and calm, indolent beyond description, an insolent little smile hovering upon her lips, but Noël's words filled her with wrath. Did he mean to say if he gave up Grace for her, the penalty might come heavy? Was that what he meant? The red showed in streaks in her face, and white fire flashed from her eyes, but Noël's broad back was all of him that saw it as he went down the avenue.

"You shouldn't meddle with his affairs, you know, even although you are smart; he might make you pay up, you know," Freda gently remonstrated, but she fled precipitately before the storm in Sylvia's countenance.

Where Sylvia was concerned, Freda was frightened of her life, and not without good cause upon this occasion, for where there was so much talk of payments, Freda's ears might have been made to pay for the pertness of her speech.



## CHAPTER XVII.

NEWS FROM THE THREE KERSTONES.—AMBROSE. — MR. KERSTONE. — GEOFFREY. — ROSELAWNS. — MRS. KERSTONE'S AMBITIONS AND MRS. ROWNTREE'S AMBITIONS.

NEWS had come from the Kerstones, which from the very first was all that could be desired. Fortune dropped her gifts freely—not with a niggardly hand; and the opening of the golden gates meant for the three men the opening, indeed, of a land flowing with milk and honey. Within the portal of the golden city—teeming with honey and roses—fortune stood awaiting them, holding out a fair hand ready to bestow the gifts she hath in store for her children.

Mr. Kerstone was the manager of an orchard; Ambrose connected with what suited him best—engineering; and Geoffrey in the employment of their benefactor. When they had first arrived it had been their good luck to meet with a man from the old country—son of an old neighbour, who had gone out there some fifteen years previous, and who had, in that mysterious way in which millionaires are made, developed the species; and it was to him they owed the good beginning which fell to their lot.

Before many weeks had elapsed, Ambrose was on his way to that wonder of wonders, which lies in the Sierra Nevada, the great Yō-Semite Valley, through which

flow the three vast rivers from which the valley takes its name—Yō-Semite, Sacramento, and San Joaquin. Ambrose lost himself in description of the vast sweeps of mile upon mile, acre upon acre of richest pasture and fertile land, the wonderfully magnificent falls, and the delightful climate.

Then he gave descriptions of his farm (he was only one of the engineers sent with the machinery): Sixty thousand acres of wheat, to reap which fifteen hundred horses and mules, a whole army of men, and three steam-engines had been sent. Ambrose, one of the army—a tiny molecule—but, in his own opinion, vastly important, because in the short time he had been employed, he had received great commendation for his expertness with the machinery. Sixty thousand acres was not the whole of it. There were immense vineyards, peach and orange groves, and alfalfa flats, one sowing of which lasted twenty years, ready to cut six times each year, yielding fifteen tons to the bushel annually.

“Was it any wonder,” Ambrose asked, “that men owning such should be called kings?”

He believed the very men attached to the cavalcade were kings, or going straight to be made kings; and asked Grace if she would not think better of it, and wait for him, and the time when he became an iron-king or a farming-king.

The wealth and good things he intended to heap upon her were beyond everything Grace had heard of. All she knew before paled, or would pale before them, if only she saw them. He only hoped he would have his fortune made out of the valley before misfortune overtook it, for he declared it was to be turned into a



playground—a great national park—before he (Ambrose) grew grey hairs, both of which, he wound up, were many a good day off yet, he hoped.

Ambrose took things in with a sweep, but Mr. Kerstone went into detail. He said they had been rather shocked the first week they had been there—that is, earthquake-shocked, but had got over it soon. Everybody did, and, therefore, they could but do as others did. Only a veritable opening of the earth and swallowing of them all up would disturb the equanimity of the nonchalant Americans; and, of course, it makes one feel cool to see other folks cool over small worries; and the smashing of crockery, tumbling of furniture, rattling down of new built bricks, and knocking of a few heads, etc., etc., was but a trifle. However, he went on, the houses are so constructed that a shock, unless it is very severe indeed, does not do a great deal of damage.

Mr. Kerstone's orchard was an orange grove. Orchard-ing had become with William Kerstone a mania. He had lost much of his inordinate love for the little spot of shamrock-spangled green sod which he had called his in his native land, and had merged it in the wealth and richness that surrounded him in a foreign land; not that he ever despised the first in his comparisons, but he loved the other, because he considered it would be a shame to be an ingrate to his foster-parent, who fed him so richly, when his own poor, weak mother could not yield him food.

He loved the one because he must—because it was his nature. He loved the other because it deserved to be loved for the gifts it bestowed.

His first charge was an orange grove, forty acres in

extent; and so easy is the cultivation of the orange tree, after it is planted, three men were sufficient for that amount—one man who understood the business thoroughly, Mr. Kerstone, and another younger man, who was also learning the art. No manure is needed in California—only irrigation. If plenty of water is given, the results are marvellous.

Mr. Kerstone lost his heart in the pleasures that surrounded him. He counted, he weighed, he measured. He told the whole history of orcharding in detail in his letters to Mr. Morton and his wife, until they felt half-convinced he was “toying.” They were doubtful William Kerstone had turned a bit bombastic. He told them when an orange tree was ten or twelve years old, the average crop was 1,000 oranges, oftentimes 2,000, and many times 3,000, and beyond that in exceptional trees. They were in full bearing six years after plantation, and, in the meantime, other varieties of fruit and vegetables were cultivated for market, as no orchardist depended solely upon oranges.

Strawberries, tomatoes, cucumbers, water-melons, pine-apples, beetroot, cauliflowers, etc., besides groves of lemons, limes, citrons, walnuts, nectarines, apricots, peaches, pomegranates, pears, apples, figs, dates, almonds, olives, and Spanish chestnuts. A peach orchard bears fruit in the second year after planting. Apples bear in the third year, and yield a full crop in five years. Vines bear rich clusters of grapes the very year they are planted as cuttings, and, after two years, they yield about five tons to the acre; after five years about ten tons per acre.

Oh, yes, William Kerstone had lost his heart! He



told his wife and Mr. Morton he would sell his place at home, pay his debts, and with the remainder begin orcharding on his own account; and as Mr. Morton's money had been paid in full in that short eight months, he felt William Kerstone was right, and in the real road to success.

"After the cabbages we used to produce at home, and considered them fine, spending a bed of manure it cost us a pang to waste upon cabbages, what was my amazement," he told them, "to see cabbages six feet high, (made an umbrella for our Ambrose), weighing 50 lbs. per head, carrots 35 lbs., onions five lbs. each, beet-root 210 lbs., water-melons 100 lbs., pears three and four lbs. each, potatoes 16 and 17 lbs. each, currants two inches in circumference, cherries three and four inches in circumference, cucumbers 50 to 60 inches in length. All these are a general thing, and many much larger, especially for shows."

Oh, yes, William Kerstone had lost his heart, and not without a little cause! His descriptions and reports were glowing, and his wife's heart beat wildly when he told her to prepare to come to the land of honey and roses—told her he had his eye upon a piece of ground for orchards, with abundant water within reach, and the sweetest little spot, where he would build for her and the girls a nest worthy of them, where the roses and creepers sprung up to the house-tops, like the legendary bean-stalk of nursery lore. He also told her of frosts and blights, of tornadoes and blizzards, of tropical tempests, whose violence and fierce destruction beggared description, laid in waste and ruin in one short hour the toil and labours of many years; but the good

things were so many and so great, they more than counter-balanced the bad. He told her all he knew and learned, and the news was to the lonely woman and her two daughters waiting at home glad news indeed.

Cissie began at once to pack up their belongings eagerly, and little Poppet tossed back her hair, screwed up her mouth, looked away into the future, and laid plans, painted pictures, dreamed dreams, built castles, and tumbled them down again, as a child does his block castles, hundreds of times in one day; and when once her curly pate touched the pillow at night, she began the whole performance over again, but laid on the colours much more vivid and glorious; pictured scenes for herself more enchanting than was ever delineated upon Arabian Nights, or ever visited the opium-eater of the East; and felt sorry to wake up in the morning and find they were only visitants from Somnus, which pass away like a bubble on the stream, as fleeting as a breath upon a mirror, as intangible as a gust of wind or a streak of mist, or a curl of smoke.

Mrs. Kerstone, too, bestirred herself, brought together and stowed away their *dii penates*, the treasures of their *dulce domum*, so that in another land they might help to make what her husband called a "nest" into a comfortable and a sweet home in very truth.

Geoffrey also told of the wonders he saw. He, as has been told, was with Mr. Rowntree, the man who had stood their friend at the beginning. He told more of the beauties of his master's palatial home than of his business.

Mr. Rowntree had conceived an especial liking for



Geoffrey, and had placed him in his private office, but although Geoffrey was a favourite, he was not an idle young man, nor his situation a sinecure. Mr. Rowntree was a self-made man, and never forgot that in this world nothing worth having is ever obtained without labour, and impressed it upon every one for whom he had a regard. *Les affaires font les hommes*, he knew to be a fact, so the first remark he made to Geoffrey was, "Business makes men" (he was a man of very few words). The next, "Labour conquers everything. Are you afraid to work, young man?"

"No, sir," said Geoffrey, whose face was crimson with exertion at the time, and the perspiration standing in great drops upon his brow.

Mr. Rowntree's business was drying, preserving, and tinning various kinds of fruit and exporting them. A cargo was to go off that day; and Geoffrey, being a raw recruit, had been required to show the kind of stuff he was made of, and to any one who was concerned had shown it was very fair mettle, indeed. Mr. Rowntree had come in, and was observing him for some time; he was a stout, rather loosely made man, and generally kept his lips pursed up in a pre-occupied, meditative whistle. "Eh, you're not afraid, are you?"

"No, sir," Geoffrey replied again.

"The hand of the diligent," said Mr. Rowntree, staring at him with a fierceness he was quite unconscious of, for he was watching the drops on Geoffrey's brow run into each other, forming one great drop, which glided down his nose, and hung suspended at the tip. His pursed-up lips whistled very hard, but there was too much breath for a good, clear whistle, and his lips

were too softly pursed to make it ring; and, indeed, although he was always trying, it was suspected he did not know a single tune. He said he knew two, "St. Patrick's Day" and "The Wearin' o' the Green;" but as he never gave any proof of the assertion, to be incredulous was excusable, even in his own family, and it was a standing jest with his only daughter, "Pa's two tunes." But Mr. Rowntree maintained he did know them, with a stolid smile, and immediately after puffed and whistled away at nothing with amazing persistency and complacency. He thrust his large, red, labour roughened hands into his pockets as he watched Geoffrey. He said he did not believe in lily-fingers, except in ladies, so he never took the smallest care of his hands; indeed he treated them rather badly, and sun-blisters in summer upon their backs and chilblains in winter were not things quite unknown, although those same hands counted his dollars by the million, and few men had a home, a wife, and a daughter who could compare with Hugh Rowntree's.

He watched Geoffrey as he wielded his hammer, fastening up case after case; then he turned upon his heel, and disappeared within his own office without a word, and Geoffrey saw him no more that day.

But that was Geoffrey's last week in the packing room. Mr. Rowntree discovered he needed another young man in his office, because he had too much to do himself. He ordered Geoffrey into his presence; and, without looking at him, whistled meditatively for a few seconds until it became embarrassing; then the lips unpursed themselves. "Use a pen as well as a hammer, eh? School, suppose?"



Geoffrey, who fancied he was wanted to write labels or some such thing, said he could write a fair hand.

Mr. Rowntree called his manager to him. "See if he can write—give him something to do," and whistled away as if it was the whole business of his life, without looking at either of them again.

Geoffrey was astonished to find this meant he was to learn the business with a view to becoming manager himself one day if he deserved it and worked for it.

Mr. Robb, the manager, who—*tel maître, tel valet*—had shortened his sentences in imitation of Mr. Rowntree, looked him all over, out of the corners of his eyes, over his left shoulder, gave him a hint as to the kind of conduct he was to observe. "No larks, young man; won't be put up with here; understand, eh?"

Geoffrey, who had been embarrassed with his master, felt the colour rise in his face under the surly manner of Mr. Robb, as he said, "Yes." But it was only "manner" with Mr. Robb, who was in reality like his master—a kind-hearted man. But both of them knew it was not good to open too brilliant a prospect upon the inexperienced eyes of young men all at once, to dazzle and unfit them for their work; better to let it come upon them as a pleasant surprise, and as a reward for work well done.

So Geoffrey, although he knew he was being promoted and in favour, felt he would require to deserve what he had got before any more were bestowed upon him. He bent his shoulder to the wheel and his young neck to the yoke in a way which proved to both men their judgment had not been mistaken nor their good opinion misplaced.

Geoffrey had been upon several occasions invited to Mr. Rowntree's private house, and had written home of the wonders of California, and the greatness of wealth as displayed at "Roselawns." The whole of the beautiful house was embowered in roses, the whole side of one of the fronts disappearing, as great sliding doors opened the magnificent reception rooms at once upon the grounds, with only a few immense wide shallow steps, in handsome mosaic-work reaching down to the latter. Cooling fountains played everywhere, but the finest was one of crystal just before those open doors; tier upon tier of bubbling cold water—the centre jet twenty fathoms high—fell with a rustle and splash into the great basin, with vine-covered border, where the gold and silver fishes rose to the surface with open mouths to receive the sparkling drops, and were pelted down to take breath and refuge under the shady vine leaves where they kissed the water. The fountains cooled the tropical heat and wet the brilliant roses. Humming birds and gorgeous, screaming parrots came and fluttered about the basin, and the drops fell and glistened upon their gay feathers; brightly painted butterflies and gauzy-winged insects hung on the hot air or rested upon the roses—the sweet scent of which wafted amongst the pillars of the reception rooms beyond, where nymphs and naiads clung amidst their garlands of flowers, and Venus and Adonis, in glistening white marble, posed on pedestals amongst glossy palms and ferns. Gods and goddesses reclined upon the marble floors, as they may have done upon the Olympian heights, but little Thérèse Rowntree generally took her afternoon nap, ate her fruit and ices, sipped her tea, and received



her friends in her glorie-bower; which latter was none other than a standard rose grown to such dimensions—its branches spreading down to the ground—that a dozen people could while away an afternoon under its shady retreat. And, talking of roses and shows, a single rose from Thérèse's bower would make a bonnet such as never yet milliner compiled for the decoration of dames, for simplicity, chic, and beauty, and from buds of which Thérèse wove for herself a floral crown and necklace to wear like the Hawaiian maidens. And while she did so, good Mrs. Kerstone away at home wove dreams for the benefit of her son Geoffrey; wondered what sort of bringing up the rich man's daughter was getting, and if she would make a *good enough* wife for her dear, handsome boy; had visions of an early partnership with both father and daughter from the very first letter Geoffrey sent her; held imaginary conversations with Mrs. Rowntree and Thérèse, in all of which she proved to them they hardly knew as well as she how to bring up a girl fitted to be the wife of her son; and in these same conversations adopted a very superior and patronising tone towards them, as became the mother of a son whom they were bent upon winning—for winning him, Mrs. Kerstone felt assured, was the sole aim and object of the lives of the millionaire and his wife,—and that the dainty little Thérèse's heart was lost to the young man, who had nought but the clothes he stood up in; and that, too, upon the very first occasion of her seeing him, was a fact indisputable and beyond doubt—a firm conviction not to be uprooted from Mrs. Kerstone's fond motherly heart.

That they had designs upon him she felt, and that

she had designs upon them she did not refuse to admit to herself. As to Geoffrey, himself, it must have been that he could not forget those mad races in the muddy country lanes with Freda Conningsby's pony, or that he could not forget Freda's little tyrannical ways; or, if these were not the reasons, who shall say exactly what they were? But, true it is, Freda was the person Geoffrey hit upon to send little boxes of *curios* and mementoes to, and long, badly-written, blotched letters on thin paper, out of all the people whom he knew and all the girls he left behind him. And Freda's only fits of industry were the hours she spent in answering them in equally long, and much worse spelt letters.

Mrs. Kerstone knew nothing about any such correspondence. Mr. Ford-Barron, as Freda told Grace, refused to see Freda was growing up; and Mrs. Ford-Barron, under the conviction that Geoffrey's boyish letters came from a school-boy no older than Freda herself, permitted her to receive and write, or not, just according to Miss Freda's own sweet will.

And, indeed, if the truth must be told, Geoffrey was very far from laying siege to spoiled, pretty Thérèse Rowntree's heart. He was rather frightened at that wilful little dame than otherwise. Somehow, although he rather liked to be tyrannized over, it was only by the special kind of tyranny possessed by Freda Conningsby alone. He was not, by any means, given to lying down in general and allowing people to walk over him. But, as nothing else would do Freda, why he had let her, so having one tyrant—one was enough,—and Geoffrey was quite satisfied with that one, and never thought of taking up another.



Mrs. Rowntree was not without some dreams for her child, as well as Mrs. Kerstone, and, needless to say, Geoffrey had no part in them. She generally thought them out in her favourite walk, which was a covered walk of geraniums, grown to gigantic proportions—walls of gorgeous bloom, eight feet high,—and if her ambitions for her daughter's welfare in life had grown in accordance with her geraniums, they must have been colossal, indeed, and soared loftily over the head and beyond the reach of the poor Irish lad.

But Mrs. Kerstone knew nothing of the effect climate has in expanding both minds and things. She looked at her own roses, and could not credit Thérèse's were as large as footballs. She picked off withered leaves from her window-flowers, and believed not the very same plants grew over Mrs. Rowntree's head in the West in one year, larger than twenty years' growth of the finest rhododendron at Aylesbury. So although in her flights of fancy she flew high and bold, they were but as the flight of the swallow compared with the eagle, to Mrs. Rowntree's little efforts in that direction.

A millionaire was very well for Mrs. Kerstone, but Mrs. Rowntree looked with a contemplative eye towards the Elysian heights adorned by nobility, and even regretted there were no English Princes of blood-royal old enough to suit her daughter, but contented herself with looking up all the best-sounding ducal names, and following in the Society journals the doings of the heirs to the titles, whether married or otherwise, and looking over the top of her paper at Thérèse, to see how she would look if she were called "Your Grace" every day. Then she set to choosing out which


of all the fashionable marriages she would like best to imitate for Thérésé; tried to count up how much a whole list of wedding presents would cost, if one had to buy them oneself. Mrs. Rowntree fully intended to scratch out any name in Thérésé's list which sent walking-sticks, match boxes, card cases, toilet requisites, pocket handkerchiefs, carvers, scent bottles, travelling clocks, paper-cutters, vases, photo-frames, salt-cellar, cork-screws, or pen-wipers—and Willie Hodge-Pedlow's mother was quite capable of making a present of any one of those useful articles upon the occasion of her son's marriage, for she was a miser and a screw, as Mrs. Rowntree knew, although her husband had made a fortune out of petroleum, and was as rich as a Jew. But if they did not set their son up, and handsomely, too, they need not come around looking after her daughter. And Mrs. Rowntree's duke-hunting always ended in great scorn against the Hodge-Pedlows, whose son, Willie, was Thérésé's chief, and, one might say, *only* suitor.

So with such reports from her husband and sons, Mrs. Kerstone and her daughters looked forward eagerly to their approaching departure, Mr. Morton helping them to arrange the sale of their effects, and Grace Wardwood, entering into the excitement of packing and settling and disposing of such things as they mean to take with them, and such things as they mean to leave behind, and in the fuss, the flurry and chatter of packing and unpacking, and re-packing again (the way Poppet liked to do her work), tries to banish the sorrow and pain which have been gnawing at her heart-strings of late, causing grief, tears, sighs; all because of the wickedness of that worthless young man—that monster of cruelty and heartlessness—Noël Chester.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

MRS. MORTON'S DIGNITY UP IN ARMS.—IN BOSKY DELL.—THE  
RECTOR'S SURPRISE.—FREDA ANSWERS FOR HERSELF.—  
THE RECTORY KNOWS HIM NEVERMORE.

RS. MORTON had been having her china closet scrubbed out, and fresh lace papers put down in imitation of the fine things going on at the Rectory, and, as she arranged her best china with her own hands, remembered it was a long time since she had used them, for it was only upon very special occasions they were brought into service.

She had had half a mind to invite Mrs. Ford-Barron and her visitors, but she did not care for Miss Manfield's condescending airs, and, besides, Noël had not paid the visit for which he fished so plainly upon the evening of the fête; and Mrs Morton's dignity was up in arms. If people did not wish to come, why did they take the trouble to invite themselves? She had only told him she should be pleased to see him, and yet, after all, he had never come.

Mrs. Morton had been having an eye to the main chance, and had built just a little upon Noël's attentions to Grace. She had weighed the *pros* and *cons*, and compared notes, and declared to herself the Chesters had not all the advantages on their side. It was true they were wealthy, but they had not always been so.

Noël's grandfather had begun at the very beginning, and it was only with his father that they could be said to have reached great things; and Miss Chester was considered to be taking a step in the right direction when she married the Rector of Mossleigh. Whereas, the Wardwoods had for many generations been well-to-do farmers, growing rather better instead of worse with each succeeding generation.

Grace was handsome, refined, well-bred, clever, and had a fortune—well, if not quite as large as, say, Miss Manfield's. Still, Mrs. Morton hoped the promptings of the young man's heart would outweigh the reckonings of his head. But time had gone on, and the said young man had not come.

Mrs. Morton had quite left off comparing the advantages on one side and the advantages upon the other. Indeed, she had also left off thinking of Noël as a possible suitor for Grace, and no longer prepared fresh extra dainties of a morning ready for afternoon visitors. She had begun to think of that young gentleman with anything but friendly feelings, and felt at variance with the whole inhabitants of the Rectory generally. She turned over a few dried cheeses, which had been brought there to make room for fresh ones in her pantry, and rubbed the underside with a towel as she turned them up, musing the while.

The two dogs, who had been sunning themselves *dos-à-dos* upon the doorstep, now set up a clamour, rushing away down the avenue to greet some one.

Mrs. Morton peeped to see who approached, and beheld the laggard knight of her thoughts. She smoothed with hasty hands her ruffled hair, gave her



linen collar a put-straight little pluck, and, with a flush in her cheeks, and a mental comment, in which her displeasure vanished: "Humph! long looked-for comes at last," she went forward, with keenly observant eye, to greet her guest.

She took a rather malicious pleasure in noting his wandering eye as she chatted to him (after she had shown him where to put away *The Ladybird*, none of the men being at hand to do it), and his evident anxiety to know if Grace was at home growing into restlessness, she relieved him by telling him Grace had only gone out sketching in the woods, and Georgie would go for her.

Noël started up, and said if she did not mind, he would go with Georgie to look up Miss Wardwood.

Of course, Mrs. Morton did not mind; but Mr. Chester would come in again, would he not? and have tea, and see Mr. Morton, who would be so vexed if he did not see him; all the while feeling quite sure she would have time for a nice hot tea-cake; and sundry other choice things passed through her mind. Indeed, she felt quite positive Mr. Chester might wish to spend a few minutes in the woods, and neither felt nor showed displeasure that he gave her so little of his company.

There are times, you see, when all of us can part with the company of the dearest and most desirable of our friends, and Mrs. Morton felt this to be one of them.

Georgie chatted in a high and very wise treble all the way, telling Mr. Chester about his rabbits and a family of new puppies, showing him his pop-gun and spinning-jenny, overhauling the contents of his pockets

and his brain for material wherewith to entertain him on the way.

Down a wide vista in the Aylesbury beech-park, where the beeches form a cool, green colonnade, and the moss carpets the earth with a rich, soft, deep, yellow-green carpet, and the atmosphere is warm, hazy, and balmy: to that very same beech-park, where Sylvia Manfield wanted to make a gipsy tea-party, Georgie led Noël Chester. The bracken-bordered, the untrampled moss, and wild flowers nestled in a frill of their own leaves; brambles strayed over the fences, and wild convolvulus hung in garlands from the trees, round whose branches they clung, with great drooping bells of white or soft pink, into which the bees dipped in pursuit of honey, and the woodbine shed its sweetness all around.

Noël glances from side to side in search of Grace; but not so Georgie. He knows his way too well, and knows she will not be found until they round the further corner, where the path dips into, what is called, Bosky Dell, where the pond lies with its little islets, whereon clumps of trees grow, and where the blue sky looks down and mirrors itself in the water, and the grey spire of the church shows away in the distance, like a finger pointing out the way to heaven to the children of earth.

Georgie calls to his auntie, and receives a warning answer.

“Hush! come softly, Georgie, very softly. Here is the loveliest thing—a dragon-fly, Georgie; all the colours of the rainbow. Come gently, not to frighten it away.”



Georgie creeps very gently upon tiptoe, softly, softly, intent upon the beautiful creature hanging upon its gauzy wings.

Grace, unconscious of Noël's presence, is watching, too, and has not heard any other footsteps save Georgie's, until, still gazing skywards, she encounters two merry brown eyes close to her own, and laughing lips, which bend forward to kiss hers. Arms, tender and strong, which hold her prisoner, clasp her in a close embrace—so close, she can hear the beating of his heart, and soft words are whispered into her ear—words which reverberate and touch a responsive chord within her heart, suffusing it with joy, and gladness, and happiness, sweet beyond words.

And Noël, gazing into her eyes, his lips upon hers, forgets the world and the things thereof; forgets time, and place, and doubts, and fears, as she rests upon his bosom; care scattered to the winds, jealousy forgotten, anger dispersed, doubts banished, fears gone; and love, and nought but love, reigns supreme, the jubilant joy of love given and love returned, the sweetest joy the heart can know.

But Georgie is still intent upon the dragon-fly, with an itching in his palms for possession of the beautiful creature; and it has led him a pretty dance. To the very edge of the woods he has followed it, and it is still just beyond reach, for when he thinks it is just within reach, and makes a grab, the very waft of his eager hands puffs it higher, and the blueness of the sky, and brightness of the sun, and the delicate gauze of its gaily-painted wings dazzle his eyes. But one more effort he makes, and the tantalising thing sails higher,

higher, higher, away over the top of the sycamore tree, and is lost in the light above.

But grieve not, Georgie! Many wiser and graver heads than yours, dear child, have stretched out just as eager hands to grasp the glittering talisman which they, too, deemed within reach, and theirs, too, have vanished, become invisible, lost, amid the light, and glitter, and transient glory of which they were composed!

Georgie plunged his hands deep into his pockets, and jingled the marbles there, whistled ruefully, hopped a few steps upon one foot, and went home to his mamma, who was curious to know the whereabouts of Grace and Mr. Chester. Georgie thought they were in the woods; he also thought his auntie had got a midge in her eye, as Mr. Chester was holding her till he would take it out for her. And Mrs. Morton, with a quiet smile, cut her best cream cheese, piled up her honey cakes, and told her husband, who had come in. Perhaps he might have to wait a little for tea, as midges in the eye were troublesome things; and Mr. Morton answered dryly, as he passed one foot over the other, "Ay."

The Reverend Edward Ford-Barron, Rector of Mossleigh, was never so much astonished in all his life. He was lost in bewilderment, utterly amazed, felt quite incapable of collecting his scattered senses, felt helpless and weak, and found it strangely impossible to give a simple answer to as simple a question. He shifted his feet about nervously, as he sat in his own library, in his own worn and most comfortable arm-chair, his fingers wandering aimlessly amongst the pens and paper-cutters



upon his desk, and his eyes roving over every object, but the object opposite him in another equally comfortable arm-chair, and upon which they ought to have been courteously fixed—that object being none other than his friend and patron, Squire Aylesbury. And he, smilingly and graciously, awaiting the answer the Rector was too dumbfounded to give.

The Squire had been expected at the Rectory that afternoon, and had arrived according to expectation, and had mentioned to the Rector his desire to hold a few minutes' private converse with him; whereupon the Rector led the way to his own special sanctum, wheeled forward a chair for his guest, and ensconced himself in another, and waited what seemed to be a confidence upon the part of the Squire. Nor was he disappointed; it was a confidence. The Squire gave him to understand he was looking forward to entering the matrimonial state at an early period, and desired to have the Rector's sanction and concurrence in the matter, he standing in the position of guardian, or natural protector to the young lady at the present moment.

The Rector had been flattered, and thought it very nice of Squire Aylesbury to consider him in any way having a right to have a voice in the disposal of the young lady in question; and told him playfully he thought it had been an open secret, in which they had all been for some time past, and asked him if he had mentioned the matter to the young lady herself yet. No, not just yet; he considered it but right to speak to the Rector first, was glad to find the way prepared for him, and assured the Rector he would devote his life

to moulding the will and forming the character, and assuring the happiness (if the Rector would commit her to his care, as he now felt assured he would,) of the beautiful young creature, the Rector's charming sister, Miss Freda.

The Rector was squashed, the wind taken out of his sails; it was a puncture, and he fell as flat under it as a pneumatic tyre. The inflation of a moment ago sunk down, and left him as helpless as a stranded jelly-fish.

"Good heavens! Why, bless my soul!—Freda! Who ever heard of such a thing?—Freda! Why, didn't everybody in the house think it was Miss Manfield? Mrs. Ford-Barron herself had said so; and if she did not know, who was to know? Why, mercy on us, the child, Freda!—What was he to say?—What would everybody say if he did such a thing with little Freda? God bless the child!—and yet what would the Squire do if he did not say yes? Why didn't somebody help him?—Where was Mrs. Ford-Barron?"

Nothing but prayers for deliverance and help would come to the Rector's aid; and all the time these were playing tricks in his brain. Squire Aylesbury smilingly leaned forward awaiting his answer.

At that very moment Mrs. Ford-Barron, unconscious of what was taking place within, stepped through the French window, Freda close behind her. The Rector mutely thanked heaven, and held out his hand towards her, as if she had come specially, in answer to his prayer, to get him out of his difficulty—to take the responsibility off his shoulders. But when he told her, her face fell a little; and when, for a moment, all the



things flashed before her memory which Freda and Hamilton had told them that morning of—the Squire and Aylesbury Hall; when the prospects before Freda as a bride there, passed in review before her, a frantic desire to laugh aloud wildly at the notion took possession of her, and it was almost more than she could do to refrain.

But Freda! No one had seen Freda as she followed her sister-in-law through the window, and for a minute she remained unnoticed, but not herself unobservant. There she stood, as if Gorgonized into stone, in the middle of the floor, in her habit and riding hat, and boots, her face white, her eyes round as saucers with horror; her mouth open in terror at what she heard. The Squire, turning, saw her, and went jauntily forward to take her hand.

“Ah, my dear young lady, how fortunate that you have just arrived at this opportune moment. Now, my dear Ford-Barron, all you have to do is give us your sanction to complete our happiness; and you, too, my dear madam, will not withhold your congratulations, I feel assured, upon this auspicious occasion.”

But a wild wail from Freda interrupted his suave speech. He had led her to the Rector's feet, there evidently intending the Rector's blessing to be bestowed upon them; but instead, Freda flung her arms round her brother's neck, nearly strangling him, and wailed: “Oh, Eddie, Eddie, save me, save me. He wants to shoot me, he does—I know he does; and the big dog would squeeze me to death—he would; I know it—I know it. Don't let him get me—don't, don't, don't. Sylvia can have him if she wants him; I don't

want him, and won't have him—I won't, I won't, I won't." And as quickly as she had clung to the Rector she let him go again—rushed away, sprang upon her pony's back, which had been standing with his nose thrust through the window, observing his distracted mistress, and before any of them knew what she was about, disappeared down the avenue, and through the gate in a wild spasm of flight.

Mrs. Ford-Barron burst into peal after peal of laughter until she grew well-nigh hysterical ; and the two gentlemen stood silent, embarrassed, and discomfited.

A lowering frown gathers upon the Squire's brow as he hears Mrs. Ford-Barron's laughter—a thunder-cloud, black as the place to where such tempers rightly belong. Mrs. Ford-Barron saw it, and exclaimed with what breath she had left :

“Oh, that wicked child ! Oh, dear ! But you know, Edward dear, she is really too young to appreciate the honour the Squire would confer. Her ignorance must be her excuse ; and Squire Aylesbury is too generous, I know, not to forgive the child's shockingly rude treatment of his very—very noble and flattering offer. Of course she is a silly child not to know better, but—but——.”

Mrs. Ford-Barron found compliments and soothing speeches had no effect upon Squire Aylesbury whatever. He was in a demoniac passion. To be refused was unheard-of insolence in a beggarly parson's sister ; but to be laughed at by the parson's still more beggarly wife was—was——. He was purple in the face, and little bits of froth hung at the corners of his rage-swollen lips. Fury had him in its grip. He would



willingly have spurned the whole "infernal pack" of them from his boot, like so many croquet balls, into "The Lake of Fire"—the pretty, poetical name he gave that notable place in his charming prayer-meeting orations. He never condescended to speak the startlingly vulgar name used by the common herd, excepting, perhaps, such occasions as the present—when he used it freely, and with such demoniac frenzy, that Mrs. Ford-Barron trembled with cold horror at sight of such fiendish, inhuman passion.

Squire Aylesbury was a despot, who would shoot down men like dogs, without compunction, if they but crossed his will; and it was well for those who came within reach of his arbitrary rule, that there was a higher power in the land to trip up such unlawful ferocity, and point out the way in which even such gentlemen *must* go.

The Rector took his wife's hand.

"Come, Vi, my dear. This is no place for you. If Squire Aylesbury takes the liberty of forgetting in my house the behaviour due to my wife, I shall take the liberty of dismissing him without ceremony."


He turned to the Squire.

"I—ahem—regret, sir, that, in your present ungovernable frame of mind, I have no further time to place at your disposal, and wish you—ahem—a very good afternoon."

The Rector was very ceremonious, contrary to his threat, and, with a still greater show of it, opened the door suggestively. But Squire Aylesbury passed out by the open window in a blind fury, and the Rectory of Mossleigh knew him—nevermore.

## CHAPTER XIX.

HAMILTON'S WICKED PLOT.—NEMESIS FOLLOWS UPON SMART'S FOOTSTEPS.—THE HON. TOM AND THE COUNTESS.—SYLVIA RECEIVES A LETTER WHILE ON HER HONEYMOON.—THE HON. TOM OBEYS.

ISS SYLVIA MANFIELD was in as great a flutter as it was possible for that calm young lady to be. She was very shortly to enter the charmed circle of a high and mighty family, and had secured for herself a very withered one, it is true, but still a sprig of the nobility. And everybody at the Rectory felt Sylvia had risen a step above them, and that it was very good of her, indeed, to continue to notice them at all, and that it was very nice of her to allow them to fetch and carry all day long, and well on into the night, too, for that matter, every little trifle that might suggest itself to her vigorous mind, by way of showing what an exceedingly lofty position was hers. She condescended mightily, in a way which only great ladies can, by allowing them to minister to her wants at all. She felt it was very nice to be a great lady, and took full advantage of the privileges her lofty position afforded. Jimmy's light feet ached, and his long back complained of the endless excursions up and down stairs with wicker chairs and tables, to place upon the lawn under a tree for her, with innumerable dishes of fruit, sherbet made from fresh lemons, fancy work,



novels, cushions, wraps, sun-shades, footstools, fans, and what not?

It was excessively hot; and cook cried, "Drat'er," when Jimmy brought another order for more lemonade in the midst of her preparation of a delicate sauce. The housemaid sank weak and exhausted upon a chair, saying, "Well, bless'es," after running three times in succession to Miss Manfield's room—first, for her novel; second, for her walrus ivory paper-knife; third, for her gold pencil; and now, a fourth order, for "Miss's hancher, the hunter-pointer one" he called after her, as she unwillingly departed upon the errand.

Jimmy had a vague idea that there was either a horse or a dog upon it, or, perhaps, a hunter and a pointer time about all round, or devices similar to the one he wiped his own face upon, as he awaited the maid's return.

Jimmy had but a slight knowledge on such affairs as ladies' handkerchiefs, *à la* Honiton Point, and was hardly in the humour just then to take a lesson in the matter. Indeed, if he had been at all desirous, he might have had a lesson upon that, and various other unique and the opposite subjects, at nearly any hour of the day; for, if the Hon. Tom dawdled in the drawing-rooms, the Hon. Tom's valet quiddled in the kitchens, looking down upon Jimmy's liberties there, and endeavouring to initiate him into more gentlemanly ways, such as showing him how to bully cook, taste his master's port and claret, and take an innocent hand at cards for threepenny bits. Jimmy was a veritable clown, and coward, too, indeed; for he was frightened to invade his master's cellaret on his own account. He

had not so much objections to half-bottles, or even whole bottles, if they were opened at table first; they then became his own legitimate property. But to deliberately crack them for himself—oh! Jimmy was brought up with a knowledge of the Commandments (Besides, the cellaret would betray such raids.) But, then, to be sure, he was a country bumpkin, and his master no gentleman.

That valet led Jimmy a miserable dance of it. Valet suggesting, Jimmy protesting. Valet criminous, Jimmy timorous. Valet insidious, Jimmy ingenuous. Valet perfidious, Jimmy suspicious. Valet sly, Jimmy shy. Valet wily, Jimmy wary. But, withal, Jimmy could not be a match for him. He took it into his head Jimmy's girls were as free to him as all Jimmy's other possessions, and took great liberties under Jimmy's very nose; and the worst of it was, the girls did not seem to have as much objections as Jimmy. He was very jolly and joking over it, and Jimmy was (privately) very fierce and choking over it; and things were generally in a rather bad way for Jimmy.

A happy thought struck Jimmy—that is, for being revenged upon the valet. Jimmy, as we all know, was no champion fighter; but he thought, if Watson at the Cross-roads had common cause with him, *he* might be able to do something with the villainous valet, and devised the little plan of bringing the valet into the way of a chance encounter with both Watson and the maids at the Cross-roads. So, curling up his little moustache (it had come at last, but very reluctantly, just three hairs on each side)—so, curling it up in the prettiest possible little rings, sallied out with the valet,



who was ever ready for any amusement which offered itself, with this wicked little plot hatching in his mind.

Things fell out just as Jimmy expected. Rosey and Minnie, with their apple-cheeks and smiling faces, loitered beyond the confines of the farmyard, and Watson and several swains not many yards off, as may be supposed.

Jimmy had given the valet as much of a stimulus as he knew he required, to set him off in the desired direction.

“They’re very nice girls, Smart; but don’t you be looking at Minnie, because, you know, there’s a little fellow might—he—he—he,—you know, might——”

But what the little fellow was likely to do Jimmy did not disclose, and Mr. Smart, supposing Jimmy to be the little fellow referred to, was not afraid of what might transpire. He was not very long upon the scene until he discovered which was Minnie, and immediately laid himself out to be attractive to that bashful maiden.

But bashfulness was no hindrance to Mr. Smart. He ogled and sidled towards her, and there was more than one pair of watchful eyes upon him. Every swain present knew Watson, and knew he would stand no trifling, and, therefore, never attempted such a thing; for Watson, in a jealous tantrum, was no gentle-handed, insignificant righter of his own wrongs, and not one present had the smallest desire to oppose a person who so rigidly reserved his own rights.

Smart sidled. A sulky expression came into Watson’s eyes, just at the left-hand corners. Smart sidled more. Watson’s eyes glittered. Jimmy trembled. Smart ogled and sidled, and sidled and ogled, uncon-

scious of the eyes upon him. Jimmy quaked at the thing he had done.

Smart caught the eluding maiden in his arms, but no sooner did he do it than he wished, withal, he had not; for such a shower of sledge-hammer blows rained down upon his genteel countenance, blood squirted up in little fountain-like spouts, his nose was flattened into his face, his eyes well-nigh gouged out of it, and he didn't know whether he had a tooth left in his head or not.

Minnie, with a scream, had rushed away, and Rosey had rushed after her in sympathy.

Watson, with a pale face, sat down upon the stump of an old tree in silence, and Jimmy was left to help his fallen foe to his feet, in terror lest he himself should be found out to have originated the whole business; and it was with much misgivings he helped Smart to wash off the dreadful blood, and applied lint-rags and ointments to the wounded physiognomy of that very limp and crestfallen individual, and sent him home with the features of an Ethiopian.

It was some time before Jimmy saw him again, and a yellowishness lingered about his eyes, and a vindictiveness in them, which made Jimmy uncomfortable in his presence exceedingly, and very glad that Miss Sylvia's visit to the Rectory terminated immediately, thereby terminating Mr. Smart's also.

For reasons best known to himself, the Hon. Tom exercised much energy, pushing on matters matrimonial with expedition not to be surpassed by the most ardent and impatient of young lovers. Indeed, he persuaded Sylvia to get married out of hand—a way which was



certainly anything but Tom's habitual way of doing things. But if it were best that the reasons for his doing so should be confined to his own bosom, that did not mean to say they were securely locked up in that private chamber. Indeed, it was very much to both the Hon. Tom's and Mr. Smart's sorrow that a few other persons were cognizant of little trifles in the lives of these two gentlemen, which they would willingly have consigned to oblivion, the latest of which most of the servants, besides Smart, knew very well; and declared it was not to be wondered at if her ladyship had grown weary of Smart's master, and had plainly told him to either make up his mind to marry the cotton girl, or betake himself off upon a long visit anywhere from Joscelin, which, she did not care, so long as it rid her of a wearisome burden.

The Hon. Tom had confided in return his utter incapacity to do either in his present circumstances; his exchequer having run so low, her ladyship must either bear with his company or supply the needful. He had not the smallest objection to do her ladyship's bidding in the matter. Indeed, he would be only too happy to oblige her in any way, but her ladyship knew, without any explanation on his part, the means requisite to obtain the desired end.

Her ladyship did know, as she had been in a similar position fifty times before. She looked at him doubtfully, and asked him which of the two things he intended to do.

"It all depends, my dear coz, upon how much you intend to give. Matrimony, you know, is expensive, but then, you are likely to be relieved for—well—some

time. As to a visit, if it does not mean much one way, neither does it mean much the other way; in short, you might have the pleasure of my company soon again."

The Hon. Tom spoke very slowly, with his eyelids half-closed, his long fingers tugging at his hay-coloured moustache, his body sunk down in a lounging position, in an arm-chair in her ladyship's boudoir, to which he had been summoned to hold the confab.

"You may marry, then," said her ladyship, briskly, "for this is certainly the very last time I shall help you. Giving money to you, Tom, is as bad as throwing it into the sea. I only hope your wife will have plenty of it—she will need it."

She opened her desk as she spoke and handed him two notes for ten pounds each.

Tom took them, examined them for a moment, raised his brows at her in surprise, and said:

"A visit, my dear coz, couldn't do more upon it." He raised himself by the elbows higher up in his chair as he spoke. "Couldn't, 'pon my word. Jewellery, rings in Solomon's, you know. Bridal presents expected, you know."

"Oh, don't talk to me of bridal presents, as if you ever paid for anything. You can pay for them *after* you are married."

But Tom had no such intention as paying either before or after his marriage. Still there were a great many things besides rings, Solomons would not let him have, which were indispensable, without a certain sum; and, of course, Tom always drained her ladyship to the very last fraction she would or could be induced to give.

"Solomons is an old blood-sucker, you know," he



went on by way of convincing her; "a d——d old blood-sucker. He drains me to the drags, 'pon my word he does; makes my life a misery to me; keeps me always on the rack, the old dog; should be very happy, indeed, if he'd go and hang himself. But couldn't possibly do it upon this, my dear coz; 'pon my soul, couldn't."

Her ladyship, knowing Tom never gave away money idly, and also knowing it would be impossible for him to do the business without a few pounds cash, was induced to part with (after wringing from him a promise he would *never* come back upon her hands again) three times the original sum, being all she had in hand at the moment. So the Hon. Tom finding there really was no more to be obtained, ordered Smart to pack up his belongings.

Very soon Miss Sylvia displayed a handsome diamond ring, exquisite necklace of sapphires, and various other ornaments, which had, unknown to her, spent much of their time lately at Solomon's and Goldenball's, and which were expected back there again shortly. Soon she packed up her boxes and took her departure unregretted. Very soon the fine wedding was a thing of the past, and soon they came to Paris, and met with the honourable acquaintances of the Hon. Tom's, who made much of Mrs. Sylvia and her beauty; and very soon the gay doings made less of the Hon. Tom's light purse, and the draining of Sylvia's began, and when that, too, was all gone, a terrible thing befell the Honourable couple.

While Sylvia was yet in all the glory and magnificence of her bridal splendour, becoming the most

brilliant of all the gay Parisiennes, there was another wedding, but a quiet—very quiet one. Only a special licence, an exquisite little *déjeuner à la fourchette*, a yachting trip for a honeymoon, and while it was taking place a newspaper announcement; and the morning which saw Sylvia's purse empty, saw also a little note upon her breakfast table from her dearest—very dearest—friend telling her she was now her still dearer mamma, and hoped they would be home to see dear Sylvia presented to her Majesty, and all her handsome dress and jewels upon that occasion, and be introduced to her highly-connected and *very wealthy* husband.

That reminded the writer, she wished to tell her dear Sylvia her dearest papa was not nearly so wealthy as they had all expected; and after she should have her own house refurnished and decorated after her own especial taste—have new conservatories and vineries built, and the gardens and grounds relaid by special landscape gardeners, have a new carriage, with a handsome pair of roan-grey horses, and new liveries, she should not allow her dear husband to be bothered any more about money matters, and hoped dear Sylvia would be considerate enough not to mention such things to her dear papa if she should write, as it was very unlikely he would listen to it, or she permit him to be so troubled; and was darling Sylvia's affectionate mamma.

Sylvia was filled with impotent wrath at the reception of this, as may be supposed; ordered the Hon. Tom imperiously to accompany her home until they should see about this; and under existing circumstances, the Hon. Tom obeyed.



## CHAPTER XX.

AMBROSE A GENIUS.—MRS. ROWNTREE LAUNCHES OUT UPON A  
MAGNIFICENT SCALE.—MRS. HODGE-PEDLOW DOES LIKEWISE.  
MR. KERSTONE AND HIS WIFE AT HOME.—LITTLE POPPET.

YEARS have come and gone, and in those that have passed, the world has gone very well, indeed, with Ambrose Kerstone. Ambrose is not an engineer upon a farm now. He has attained to much greater things, for Ambrose is a genius, and has invented some wonderful little thing connected with machinery, which he supposes any person might have done if they had only eyes to see ; but few having eyes to see like Ambrose, the little thing fell to the lot of the stalwart youth, who finds it growing into a great thing, and his boast of growing into a millionaire, or an iron king, or indeed a king of some kind, or any kind, does not seem so very idle now, for Ambrose has begun to grow wealthy, and is only at the beginning of the harvest he is likely to reap.

Mr. Rowntree greatly helped to bring out Ambrose's patent, and a warm friendship has sprung up between the family of that gentleman and our young friend, and in him little Thérèse has added another suitor to her list.

Ambrose discovered in her a startling likeness to Grace Wardwood, and fell in love with her instantly because of it. None of the others could see it, but if Ambrose saw it, was not that enough *pour tout* ?

But when Grace broke faith with him, and went and married some one else (it amounted to that in the mind of Ambrose, for he firmly believed she belonged to him), instead of thinking little of Thérésé because of the likeness, he only admired her all the more. Indeed, as time went on, he forgot he had ever been in love with Grace, and became firmly convinced he had always been in love with Thérésé, and Thérésé only. He himself swears it is so, with an easy lapse of memory; and who are we to doubt such good authority? Yea, *pardi*, who?

Ambrose whiles away many of his evening hours in the Glorie bower, not, as any one may naturally suppose, alone. He has completely disheartened Willie Hodge-Pedlow, who has found consolation in a directly opposite quarter of the city from that occupied by Mr. Rowntree's stately residence, much to the satisfaction of Mrs. Rowntree, who takes a vivacious interest in the doings of the young folks, peeping out of the arbour where her husband smokes his pipe when the family are alone, and where the purple grapes hang in clusters just as the roses do in Thérésé's bower, reflecting themselves in Mr. Rowntree's iced wine, as he puffs his Havanna weed; reflecting their powdered purpleness taking a dip, as it were, into the future, and seeing what they themselves may become when they have attained the grand final of grape-existence—mellow, sparkling wines.

Mrs. Rowntree waves her fan and cranes her neck, commenting on the objects within range of her vision and the objects of her ambition to her husband, who drowsily responds from somewhere behind the thick veil of smoke in which he has himself swathed.



Mrs. Rowntree thrusts her fingers through the vines to view still further the young folks searching for things unknown to her away down there by the pinery, and this is what she sees : A tall, herculean young man, with yellow hair, ruddy face, and blue eyes ; a dainty little maiden, vivacious, dark, piquante. The tall young man towers over the little maiden ; but she, having a mighty courage, perks up, and if onlookers were near, they might hear she had much the better of the young man with her quick repartee and his slow wit.

But might carries the day, be it right or no ; and the little maiden finds herself, wit and all, overpowered by the strength of the tall young man ; finds herself caught up like a toy, and in great danger of being crushed to pieces, strangled to death, suffocated with caresses ; in breathless disorder, her frills and fal-lals a hopeless ruin, and her neat little curls buried in the folds of a tweed coat. And, behold, the little maiden has not a word of protest to offer, not even the desire to offer it if she had it, for the tall young man has a very earnest way of expressing his devotion, and the little maiden is very happy. The curls nestle closer, and the arms clasp tighter, and eager vows are spoken ; and the voice which utters them is none other than the voice of Ambrose Kerstone, the tall and clever young man ; and the pink ears of the little maiden who hears are the ears of Thérèse Rowntree.

The vows are deep vows, for there is nothing shallow about Ambrose ; and those in return are deep also, for he would have nothing less. Ambrose swears to be hers, and to love her ; and she swears to be his, and to love him, as long as the sun shines, and the moon beams,

and the stars sparkle ; as long as grass grows, and water runs ; verily, a long time, *mais, que voulezvous ?*

Oh, yes ! Mrs. Rowntree's satisfaction is prodigious, if it were nothing else than to spoil the plans of that horrid Mrs. Hodge-Pedlow, who had been pluming herself upon her son coming into two of the greatest fortunes in California. Serves her right for being a screw, and not being willing to make proper settlements when she had the chance. Did she suppose she (Mrs. Rowntree) needs must go a-begging a husband for her daughter ? She bustled and scolded *à tour* ; plumed and prided herself upon the success she had attained ; launched festivities upon such a magnificent scale as to quite take away Mrs. Hodge-Pedlow's breath ; caused her to uplift her penurious hands, and exclaim *de vive voix* at those upstart Rowntrees, and ask what they were likely to come to, or if they had forgotten what they had come from.

Such *amuser le tapis* upon the part of Mrs. Hodge-Pedlow only caused the propeller of affairs of state at Roselawns to sniff loftily, glance scornfully from between superciliously lowered lids at her compeer ; and, with a toss of her beplumed, bespangled, becoiled, raven tresses, remark to any who cared to hear, that "some folks were so narrow-minded, so primitive, and mean in their ideas, they were incapable of rising to a respectable position when it had pleased Providence to place them in one." But *she* was not going to be mean herself upon the occasion of her only child's marriage. No ! She would do everything "*bong tong* ;" her reception should be "*roo-sheer-shee*," and Thérèse should look "pretty and chick." The taunting



voice replied: "But what need, my dear, to waste so much money, when he is not a duke, only a—what was he? A stoker! a farm-help! a—a—what?"

Mrs. Rowntree did not care. Thérèse's "*truezo*" should be the envy of dukes, and duchesses, too, and fit for any princess. And so, indeed, it was; and Ambrose's bride would have graced very well a coronet if the arrangers of destinies had so decreed it. But it was to be otherwise. And the pretty bride was just as happy as if the bridegroom had been a real live duke, and he—who is it shall say Ambrose Kerstone did not make an ideal bridegroom? But, strangest of all, was the fact, that Mrs. Hodge-Pedlow's name did not figure at the end of a list of four or five hundred bridal gifts as the donor of a corkscrew, but up very near the top, and amongst the leading lights, showing that she *was* capable of rising, and also capable of opening her heart, to the extent of gold plate, which, for many days, not only surprised, but likewise pleased good Mrs. Rowntree, and caused her to assert that, of a truth, she did not believe gold plate was in her.

And so amity being restored between the rival ladies, Mrs. Hodge-Pedlow was the recipient of many confidences from Mrs. Rowntree. And the end was, she was *aide-de-camp* and co-dispenser of hospitalities upon the day which shall see the last of Ambrose in this history, and remained with Mrs. Rowntree until the last straggler was gone; and the two refreshed themselves with iced tea while they discussed everybody and everything, the beginning and the end, till not another word remained for them to say.

And the two ladies' husbands, as all good husbands

should when the ladies were friends, smoked together, and talked trade. And when the ladies were *not* friends, why, each man was the stay and support of his own wife and her opinions—ay, even unto war and death; and glared at each other, with amazing ferocity in such calm-minded, sensible men. They were but human; and what man can withstand the confidences of the wife of his bosom?

William Kerstone is never likely to become the possessor of great wealth. He never had, and never will have, the knack of hoarding. He knows nothing of daring speculations, or bold enterprises; cares nothing for barter and 'Change; understands but little of discoveries and inventions; and has ambition for nothing save that to which he was born—to till the soil. To this end he devotes his days. Prosperity, nevertheless, has laid its hand upon him. His orchards and groves flourish; and to plant, that fair trees may grow, and to garner the rich fruits thereof, is to him joy unutterable. His wife and himself dwell in a cosy house, and enjoy a modest plenty, proud of their sons, happy in their daughters, always pleasing themselves by talking of a meditated trip to the old home, but too comfortable and settled to really set forth upon the dreaded waste of waters which lie between. Very frequently, indeed, it is referred to; but it is growing into a jest of late, which excites much mirth. Rest and content fill the hearts of the worthy couple as they pace beneath the shady branches of fig and lime, date-palm and vine, with the soft strains of familiar music and words, floating out to them from behind the lowered mosquito-blinds, sung by two fresh, young voices. 'Tis the old music and



the sweet words they were wont to sing in the old grey church of Mossleigh; and that which, of all others, William Kerstone loves best, for it calls up all the old faces—rugged and weather-beaten—the kindly faces of his old friends. It calls up a vision of the little square, green fields of his Irish home, with their straggling, unkempt thorn fences, stone dykes, storm-bent firs. It recalls the narrow roads, the woody knolls, the sloping dales, the sleepy curl of turf smoke coming up from amongst the corn-stacks, hay-ricks, and turf-stacks, in the midst of which the homestead lies. The same vision passes before both their eyes; and William Kerstone tucks his wife's hand closer under his arm, and both instinctively turn towards some shining, white object in the sunniest and sweetest corner of the orchard. It is a beautifully-sculptured piece of white marble, which marks the spot William Kerstone and his wife have chosen for their last resting-place, when the angel shall come to summon them before their Creator. Silently they read the engraven words upon it:

“Jesus said: I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. Believest thou this?”

“Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord.”

“Them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.”

“It is a faithful saying: If we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him.”

The gold letters gleamed in the sun, in their setting of glistening marble. It had been placed there when little Poppet trembled upon the border of the valley of the shadow, when they thought they should lose their youngest and best beloved. But she had been

mercifully spared, and was the only one at home with them to keep them merry and bright, and to laugh first when her father cracked his famous joke of how he should make Mossleigh folks stare at his grandeur when he went home to visit them all. But both Mr. and Mrs. Kerstone knew their dust should never lie with their forefathers, but far away from them—far away in the golden West, where the column of white marble marks the spot.

It is Poppet whose voice trills out the music of her father's favourite hymns within doors, and the other voice mingled with hers is none other than that of Willie Hodge-Pedlow, whose mother at first demurred at his proclivity for spending his leisure hours in an unfashionable quarter of San Francisco; but who, when she discovered her friend Mrs. Rowntree's willing acceptance of a member of the same family, not only gave her consent, but expressed her entire satisfaction at the arrangement. Becoming a member of the same family into which Mrs. Rowntree's daughter had married, was next best to being married to Mrs. Rowntree's daughter herself. Hence her content and munificent present of gold plate to that lady.

The eldest daughter of the Kerstone family married a short time after her arrival in California, and Geoffrey is the one likely to be left as a pet for his father and mother. And if it were not for a pretty little scene, which we saw some twelve months later than the foregoing narrative, it is possible Geoffrey might have taken his leave of us as a single gentleman, and as such passed beyond our ken. But we shall tell tales upon Master Geoffrey.



## CHAPTER XXI.

IN THE SWEET MAY-TIME.—AT THE CROSS-ROADS AND AT  
THE RECTORY.—THUS WE SHALL LEAVE HER.—FINIS.

**I**T was in the sweet May-time of the year, when nature decked the fruit trees in fairest garb. An old crab-tree grew in a shady country lane, and, as if in compensation for its gnarled stem and distorted branches, its crown of blossoms was more luxuriant, more beautifully blended pink and white than that of any other crab-tree in the land. It shed a petal, one now, one again, like a caress, upon a gentle bay mare which stood beneath its shade, with outstretched neck, rubbing its black nose against its mistress's arm, and sniffing occasionally at her fondling fingers. The bay mare's mistress is—a once rather hoidenish girl—grown into a bashful, modest, slender, graceful, and very beautiful young lady; tall, too; in dark blue riding habit; her once fussy bright hair now coiled up beneath a neat riding hat, and her still mischievous eyes are now cast down, pretending to trace patterns in the dust at her feet.

But, with all the transformation, any one who looks will not have the smallest difficulty in recognising Freda Conningsby; neither will they experience any trouble in discovering the personality of her com-

panion, who is contesting with the bay mare the right of possession over that young lady's hands. His clothes have unmistakably an American cut; his voice something of a drawl; and his ruddy cheeks are not so ruddy as they were wont to be, but show the browning touch of hotter climes than ours, which in Freda's eyes adds very greatly to the good looks and manly appearance of the young man. *Et voilà*, this same young man is he of whom we had well-nigh taken our leave, consigning him to a life of single blessedness.

But Master Geoffrey found a notion in his cap to take matters into his own hands and settle them for himself. He was the only member of the Kerstone family who ever really came back to the country in which he was born; and half a notion pursues me that it was not without an object he came. The bay mare might tell; so also might the old crab-tree in the lane.

But with them we shall leave their secrets. It is enough for us to know that when Geoffrey (who is junior partner in the firm of Rowntree, Robb, and Kerstone, and a great favourite with his seniors, to the elder of whom he stands more in the stead of a son than does even his brother Ambrose, and has won for himself a secure place in the confidence of both his partners) returns from his summer trip he carries with him a pretty bride, whose name is Freda.

Mr. Morton is bluff and hearty as ever, and is beginning to break in Georgie, who rather resembles an obstinate young colt in that matter, and initiate him into the first principles of farming; the only part of which he liked was going to feed the horses when



he ought to have been preparing his lessons in agriculture for school on the morrow.

But Georgie had wily ways with him, and did not experience *very great* difficulty in persuading both his father and mother that practice was better than theory. It was much better to learn to feed the horses by seeing it done than learning off by rote so many paragraphs about draining, top-dressing, and what not, out of which Georgie could make neither head nor tail. Indeed, the only thing he found himself capable of doing, when he was not permitted to supervise the feeding, was the drawing of innumerable horses over his agriculture book, with prodigious tails in the most astonishing curl, and the symmetrical results of which proved to satisfaction he was certainly no budding Landseer.

Little May, too, had received some first lessons in the arts of housekeeping, but liked dolly-housekeeping best; yet she liked to skim cream; that was very important-looking, and very nice to do as well. She liked to roll up little pats of butter, too; but she likewise felt desirous of eating them as butter-cakes when she had done. She was very fond of baking cakes when her mother baked, and thumped up the same piece of dough into a dozen different shapes before putting it into the oven to bake; but, mark you, Miss May did not like to eat that. Indeed, when it disappeared within the oven it generally escaped May's memory. She lost all interest in it, and it came out unrecognisable as May's cake, and was known only as a black cinder, which was consigned forthwith to the dust-bin. But, above all, she objected to rocking

the cradle. There were more young olive-branches at the Cross-roads besides these two, and it was a little office May was often requested to fill. But May fought it royally; and, upon the whole, Georgie and she were a very likely and promising young couple, indeed.

There is no change in Mrs. Morton. She still finds her household, her husband, and her family as much as any reasonable woman can be expected to take in hand; and, verily, it is not every woman could manage the trio. But, then, her husband tells her she is one woman in a thousand. What a lucky man was he to be the possessor of that one! and is it not a pretty thing to have such comfortable conceit?

*Au revoir, mes amis, au revoir*; yet we may never meet again. But, whether we do or not, there shall ever remain a kindly feeling in our hearts for Thomas Morton, and his pleasant wife, and they of his household, who dwell at the Cross-roads farm.

Mr. Ford-Barron is not quite so bent upon obtaining honours as a rose-grower as he was of yore; but still he buds, he prunes, he protects; still he rides about upon—not old Dobbin (for he, with Freda's "Faërie Queene" and old brown Clara, lies peacefully below the south wall of Mossleigh Rectory gardens); but another Dobbin, who carries his master with the soft handshake and grandiose manner amongst his parishioners as soberly as any other Dobbin that ever plodded behind the bit.

Mrs. Ford-Barron is chatty and brisk as ever, and takes about with her to Dorcas meetings, etc., a pretty, slender, girlish-looking boy, with blue dreamy



eyes and long golden ringlets, whom Georgie Morton teaches to play peg-top, to crack whips, fly kites, and ride upon his new donkey, and tries to bully in a protecting, patronising fashion, and over whom May Morton plays the schoolmistress, shows him her dolls, her picture-books, and needlework, and encourages any little girlish tendencies she finds in him; whom the Rector calls "Barron Lifroy Ford-Barron, ahem!" and his mother "Little Runny" upon ordinary occasions, and Roy upon public occasions.

Sarah Ann Morrison is kitchenmaid at the Rectory now, and has taken to curling a fringe, which makes her look like a ferocious aborigine of Central Africa; and all, *voilà*, by way of captivating Hamilton, the footman, who is still in the condition of life when it is quite permissible for him to be both captivating and captivated, and to receive all the homage, admiration, adulation, and attentions the maids of the neighbourhood of Mossleigh are willing to bestow or are desirous of laying at his feet. He curls up the ends of his little moustache, ogles them every one in turn, and is, to express it mildly, one of the vainest and most conceited creatures alive to-day upon the Emerald Isle, not to mention that place which we can all take in with so bold a sweep when we fail to find adjectives great enough to express ourselves with—*The World,—the greatest in all the world.*

Mr. Peeler, too, is still in the same state as Jimmy—that is, he is open to any little attentions, or little suppers, or any other little treat of that nature. He never could forget the time when Mrs. Battle unbent to him in the gloaming of a summer's evening, bestowed

caresses upon him, and invited him to partake of a nice little bit with herself some evening at the Rectory; and it was possibly for that reason he still remained open to similar invitations. One never knows when the like may turn up, and Mr. Peeler was ever on the alert for a repetition of it. But, perhaps, he could not bring himself to banish the memory or lessen the greatness of the honour he had once received; and ever in his soliloquies and musings upon the gentle creatures comes to the conclusion (be his reasons what they may), that "weemen's the de-ow-il."

The old ladies of royal descent at the Friary grow older as the years go by; but they do not alter their habits. Miss O'Connor O'Neill issues invitations to all to whom she takes a liking to come to see the Friary; and Miss Norah relates her stories. But woe betide the prying or incredulous, the sneering or invidious! They would whip them with a whip of scorpions, lash them with a rod of stern rebuke, thrust forth from their presence the scornful fault-finder, and leave them to gnash their teeth in the darkness of envy and incredulity without, while they within, Miss Norah, cut slices of nun's cake, and her sister exclaimed:

"Oh, *wirasthru*, *wirasthru*! but it is a weary world, and we are sinners all!"

The old ladies tell with vast pride the history of Lazy Tall, who is lazy no longer; but, from seeking poetical inspirations in the sky above him, took to burying his nose in all sorts of rubbishy old volumes at the Friary, and took such delight therein, that, from reading old books, he took to writing new ones, and his aunts might cry if they choose, who is there *tout savant*



*qu'il est.* But he is far away, and only little droppings, scraps of news come to them from Talbot. But when he sends them a new book, they are as if heaven opened unto them—much happier, indeed, than if he had never left them, but remained with them to be (mistakenly) their joy and solace. He was much more to them away than he could ever have been at home; and the amount of wonderful things they found to say about him, and the tricks and doings of his childhood, which they recalled, would have made the famous man blush to the roots of his hair with shame, or run away in a fit of horror, if he could have heard. But what he did not know, of course, did him no harm, and it made the old ladies perfectly happy, and frequently made Miss O'Connor O'Neill say:

“Ah, well, indeed, then, an' it's queer times, to be sure; an' it's many's the change there is since I was young. *Ná bac leir.* Talbot a bú. (Never mind it, Talbot. Hurra! Go on to victory.)”

As for the Hon. Tom Russell and Madame Sylvia, what more irritating condition of life is there to be in than to have lofty notions and little money? Tom tried to make more of it at the *rouge et noir* table, but much more often lost; and Sylvia, if she found herself in an irritating position, carried as much of the irritation as it was possible for any clever lady to do to her father's house and her father's wife.

It was not all conservatories and new carriage horses for the latter lady. She had her conservatories, to be sure; but she had also Sylvia. She had her carriage; but she had Sylvia. She had her horses and liveries, and new furniture and decorations, and all the rest of it;

but she had also *Sylvia*, and, bless me ! but she had a time of it ! She had her of a morning, of an evening, and at noontide. She had her all day, and every day, and no night was free from her. She breakfasted, she dined, she lunched, she supped, she drank tea with her. Sometimes she brought the Hon. Tom, and sometimes she had to go home to look after his Honour ; but at all times she was there. Mrs. Manfield made one great mistake, after which she could never get the better of Sylvia. She presented her husband with a daughter. Sylvia remedied the evil by promptly presenting a grandson, and ever after Mrs. Manfield felt Sylvia had the upper hand. However, once in a way, the under-hand can do a great deal, and Mrs. Manfield did it.

Sylvia's life was no bed of roses, and it required all her attention to obtain her rights. But she was indefatigable, and followed up the pursuit *à grande peine*. Many were the plans she laid for the future of her son, and not the least amongst them was a proposed alliance with the house of Chester, to the great amusement of Noël, and the infinite disgust and indignation of his wife. Indeed, Sylvia once carried Master Russell all the way to the Wold, the residence of the Chesters, with a view to bring about a baby engagement, and to seal it, too, in the way she once told Grace Noël, and she herself had done. But, somehow, the little termagants got into loggerheads, and scratched, and screamed, and kicked ; and the proposed bride—naughty little rogue—whose mother had called her Paloma (a white dove), showed a monstrously barbaric desire to commit a personal outrage upon the weak-eyed, pale-haired,



apathetic baby bridegroom offered for her acceptance. Then she hid her rebellious tear-stained face behind her father's coat, and listened to the ticking of his watch for consolation to her outraged feelings; and her mother carried her away with severe, indignant eyes, and sent her to walk in the gardens with her *bonne* and the baby for the remainder of Mrs. Sylvia's visit, and read her husband a lecture after Sylvia's departure, and wondered how he could find amusement in such disgusting conversation, saw no jest in it, and hoped Sylvia would not repeat her visit for some time to come. But trust Sylvia, when she picks up a good idea; she is as tenacious as a dog with a bone, and Grace does not know but she may one day play the part of mother-in-law to a withered, indolent sprig of the nobility, with Sylvia for partner in the relationship.

The mellow sunshine of early autumn bathes the lawns and parks of the Wold in yellow light. The peacocks scream and strut about with fanned tails upon the terraces, where marble vases overflow with brilliant trailing flowers, and the windows show up like burnished gold. The trees show touches of yellows, and reds, and browns, and the ripe apples fall amongst the grass in the orchards. Great waggons of winnowed grain are piled up in the stubble fields, and the voices of the waggoners are borne upon the warm drowsiness of the afternoon for miles, and fall upon Grace's unheeding ears, where she sits in her wicker chair, piled with down-cushions under the spreading branches of an ancient oak. She looks with dreamy eyes at the landscape spread before her, the verdant meadows and the swelling uplands, the clustering woods and the rich

cultivated land, and waits and listens while she waits for the sound of horse's hoofs, which brings to her her husband. She can hear the laughter and chatter of the children over beyond the fish-pond, and peace and happiness are her portion. In a few minutes the sound she listens for comes to her ears, and she leans forward to see her husband come round the bend in the drive.

It is the same Noël Chester we knew, handsome and graceful, who springs from his horse: the same gay, sunny-tempered gentleman we saw wooing his bride not so very many years ago in Ireland, and he has not changed greatly, and is the very light of his wife's eyes; "For," thinks she, as he comes forward, "is not birth, beauty, good shape, discourse, manhood, learning, gentleness, virtue, youth, liberality, and such like, the spice and salt that season a man?" And it is with a world of pride in her eyes and a loving greeting she goes forward to meet him, and receives the tender kiss he stoops to give.

The groom, too, over there, leading the horse away—is there not a likeness in him to Watson of the Cross-roads? The same spare limbs and neat gaiters; the same soothing pat for The Ladybird's neck as he bestowed upon it that Christmas Eve years ago, when they first made each other's acquaintance. And down by at the lodge—is not that fresh-faced, smooth-haired, smiling little woman, with a loose collar, and in a perpetual state of breathlessness, hunting down a white, bullet-headed young rascal, who is everlastingly running away in search of his father; and who, in default of finding that person, may probably drop himself into the



fish-pond, or, at all events, keeps his mother ever on the race to catch him up as he makes his many escapes;—and is not that same little woman the rosy-cheeked maid known as Minnie at the Cross-roads Farm? And are not she and her husband faithful servants to the young master and mistress whom they have followed? And both declare never had groom or lodge-keeper a better master or mistress than theirs.

Mrs. Chester pours out tea for her lord beneath the oak-tree, and sits beside him with hands clasped upon his knee, looking into his face as he lazily sips it. A wicked little smile twinkles in his eyes as he looks back at her, and tells her of having seen Sylvia, and how she is still bent upon having Grace's daughter for her son's wife. Mrs. Chester makes a little move, pulls his two ears (very gently, to be sure) by way of punishment; and this disarranging the cushion behind his handsome head, she pats and re-arranges them again, and bends to kiss the lips that still smile wickedly at her.

The babies come, and, with cries of delight, rush upon their father, to be taken upon his knee. Mamma picks strawberries, and puts them into their mouths all round, and Noël looks into his wife's clear eyes as she continues her sweet ministrations, and thinks: "Truly is a good woman the crown of her husband, and the joy of his household." And when mamma picks a fourth strawberry, which ought to go into her own mouth to complete the circle, baby opens hers, thinking she ought to have two for the other's one; mamma pops it in, and a burst of laughter follows, and there is much

merry-making. Noël brushes up his Shakespeare, and, looking fondly into his wife's eyes, says :

“ Beshrew me, but I love her heartily ; for she is wise,  
if I can judge of her ;  
And fair she is, if that mine eyes be true ; and true  
she is, as she hath proved herself ;  
And therefore, like herself, wise, fair, and true, shall  
she be placed in my constant soul.”

Thus we shall leave them, in as great happiness as mortals are permitted to know in this world. Here we shall leave Grace, in the love of her husband and her pretty babes—a loving wife, a tender mother, and a good woman, of whom it is said : “ Her price is far above rubies.”

“ Her children arise up and call her blessed ;  
Her husband also, and he praiseth her.”

THE END.



Printed by  
EDMUND BURKE & Co.,  
61 & 62 Great Strand Street, Dublin.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

# IN THE VALLEYS OF SOUTH DOWN.

CROWN 8VO. PRICE 2s. 6d.

## OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

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"Messrs. M'Caw, Stevenson and Orr have recently published in very tasteful form a little book with strong local interest. This is 'IN THE VALLEYS OF SOUTH DOWN,' a tale by one who calls herself 'Athène,' and who dedicates her work to Mr. Ruskin and Miss Constance F. Gordon Cumming in admiring terms. The story is one constructed on simple lines. It concerns chiefly the love affairs of a certain Mabel Mervyne and Rupert Stanwell, and its locality is, as the title would at once suggest, in the Valleys of South Down. Considerable skill in characterisation is shown by the authoress in the drawing, more especially, perhaps, of that eccentric personage, Mr. William Ewart Charles Stewart, justice of her gracious Majesty Queen Victoria's peace, and of Marion Stanwell, Rupert's pert and designing sister, whose little conspiracy parts the lovers for several years—rather to their advantage, it may be thought. The descriptive passages and the glimpses of life in South Down are very well done. There are, it may be, some signs of crudity here and there; the author may scarcely yet have learned to subordinate details to breadth of effect, but the story is quietly effective, and will be read with pleasure."

*From the Londonderry Sentinel, December 17th, 1898.*

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“We have received a copy of ‘IN THE VALLEYS OF SOUTH DOWN,’ by an Irish authoress, who writes under the *nom-de-plume* ‘Athène.’ It depicts in a charming way country life in County Down, and deals, as one would naturally be led to expect, with the old story—an indispensable theme in now-a-day novels. But ‘Athène’ has presented the subject with such refinement and in a manner that cannot fail to impress her readers, whilst she tells the story of rural simplicity in that historic county. The book is admirably written, and—although there is at first a trifle of sameness about it—must appeal to everyone who is fond of wholesome reading.”





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